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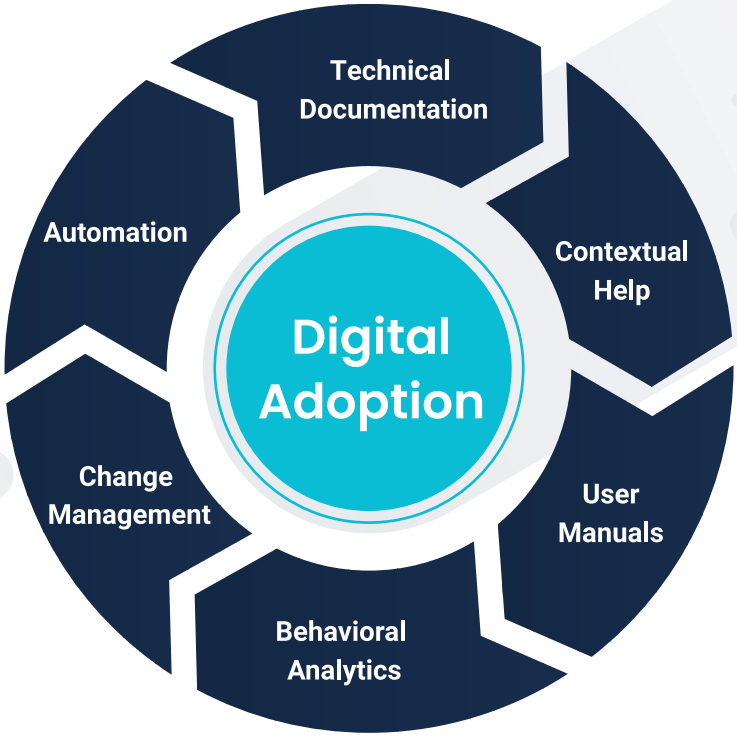

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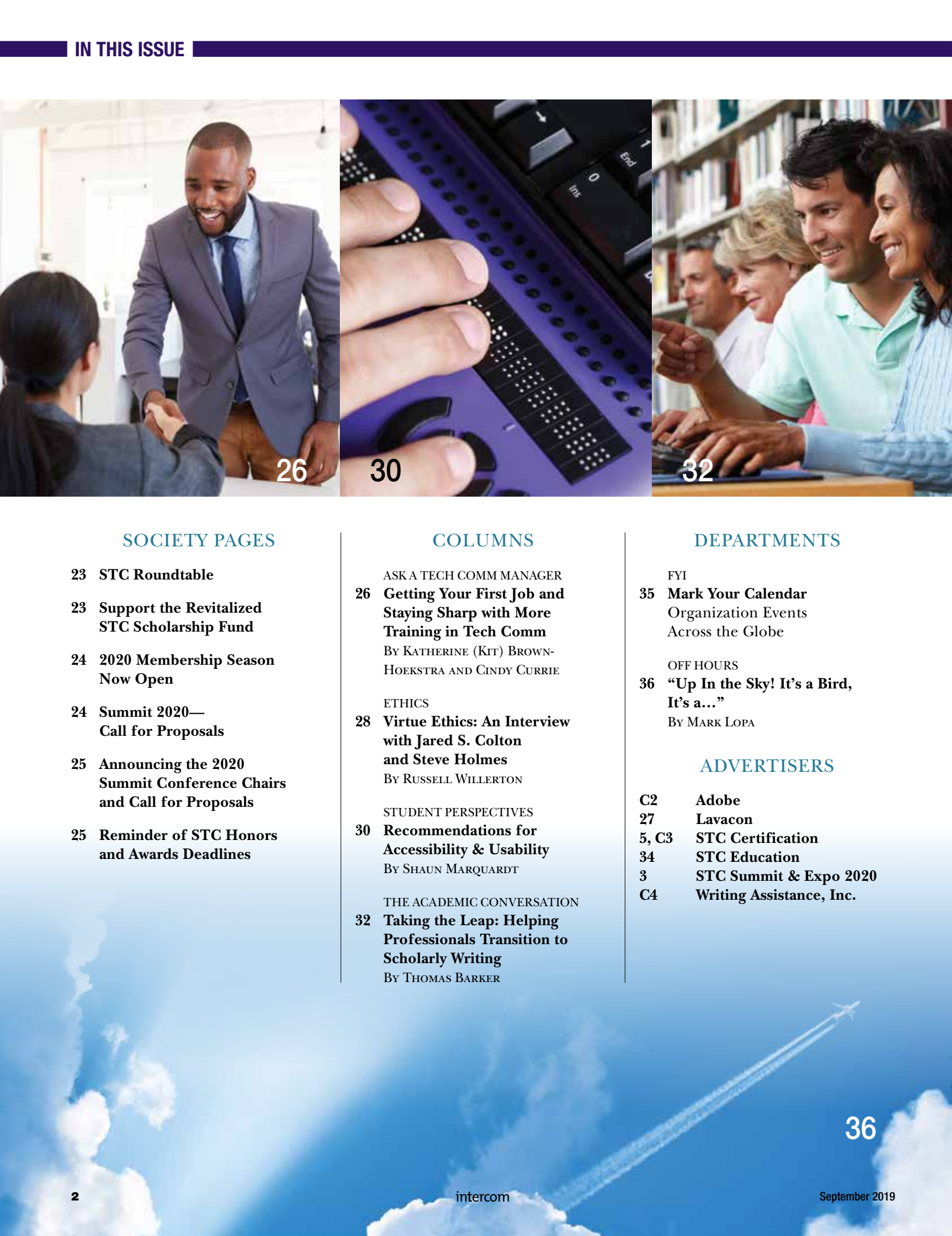

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A Note from the Editor

WHEN I CHOSE the "Global Content" theme and began recruiting authors, I really wanted an issue that would be different than the traditional rants about internationalization, localization, and translation. Not that those things aren't important, but there are already many venues for those discussions.

I was really looking for some more unique conversations and some of the more subtle issues that serving our audiences across so many countries, cultures, and communities can raise. As the articles in this issue demonstrate, there are many unique considerations around content that is truly global and inclusive that we, as professional technical communicators, likely do *not* think about on a regular basis.

I'm the first to admit that global content, while very interesting to me, is not my area of greatest expertise. Luckily, we have an incredible community of experts who generously shared their perspectives on this aspect of content that we all must consider and accommodate as we perform our daily work.

In our first article, Val Swisher reminds us how important it is to have a content strategy—even more important when your content is global! Read "Why You Need a Global Content Strategy" closely to get Val's best tips for getting started on a global content strategy.

Rahel Bailie describes the world of English from the experience of living in many different English-speaking countries. In "Localising—Or Is That Localizing—Content within a Language," Rahel raises our consciousness about the differences and issues of communicating across cultural, political, and geographical boundaries within a single language.

Next, CJ Walker enlightens us about the differences across another set of languages—the many sign languages for the Deaf. If you, like many, believe that sign language is universal, CJ provides an overview of signers that will dispel that belief in "Sign Language Is *Not* Universal."

Mark Clifford takes a completely different approach to the idea of global content—the perspective of those of us who do, or would like to, work abroad. What do you need to consider when aiming for a new job or assignment in another country? "So you Think You're Ready to Work Abroad?" will help you avoid the pitfalls.

Savannah DeFreese and Elizabeth Sonewald describe and summarize a breakfast interview with Dr. Kirk St.Amant in "Seeing Worldviews and You-Views." In the article, Kirk relates many truths of our global age and provides some concepts for communicators to leverage as we try to understand and better communicate with our global audiences.

And, in our online edition, Girish Hasabnis shares a few tips for technical communicators who want to leverage the power of Unicode in "Unicode, a Boon for Authors and Translators."

I also have four columns for you in this issue:

- In the latest installment of the Ask a Manager column, Kit Brown-Hoekstra and Cindy Currie provide a great list of resources for training on tools and other tech comm topics, and they give their manager perspectives on how to break into the field and find your first job after graduation.

- In Russell Willerton's Ethics column, he shares an interview with Jared S. Colton and Steve Holmes, authors of *Virtue Ethics*, and helps us understand how virtual ethics applies to technical communication.
- Ryan Weber turns over his Student Perspectives column to Shaun Marquardt, who discusses the importance of—and shares his top 10 tips for—accessibility.
- And last, but certainly not least, Tom Barker's Academic Conversation column describes the challenges that professionals face when transitioning to scholarly writing—and he shares the techniques he uses when shepherding workplace professionals into academic and scholarly work.

> There are many unique considerations around content that is truly global and inclusive that we, as professional technical communicators, likely do *not* think about on a regular basis.

As always, don't forget to check out the Society pages! And remember: we include author and columnist email addresses so that you can get in touch. My email address is here, too! We can discuss articles and issues with you online, so we hope that you'll ask a question or start or join a conversation!

Until next time!

— Andrea L. Ames
andrea@idyllpoint.com

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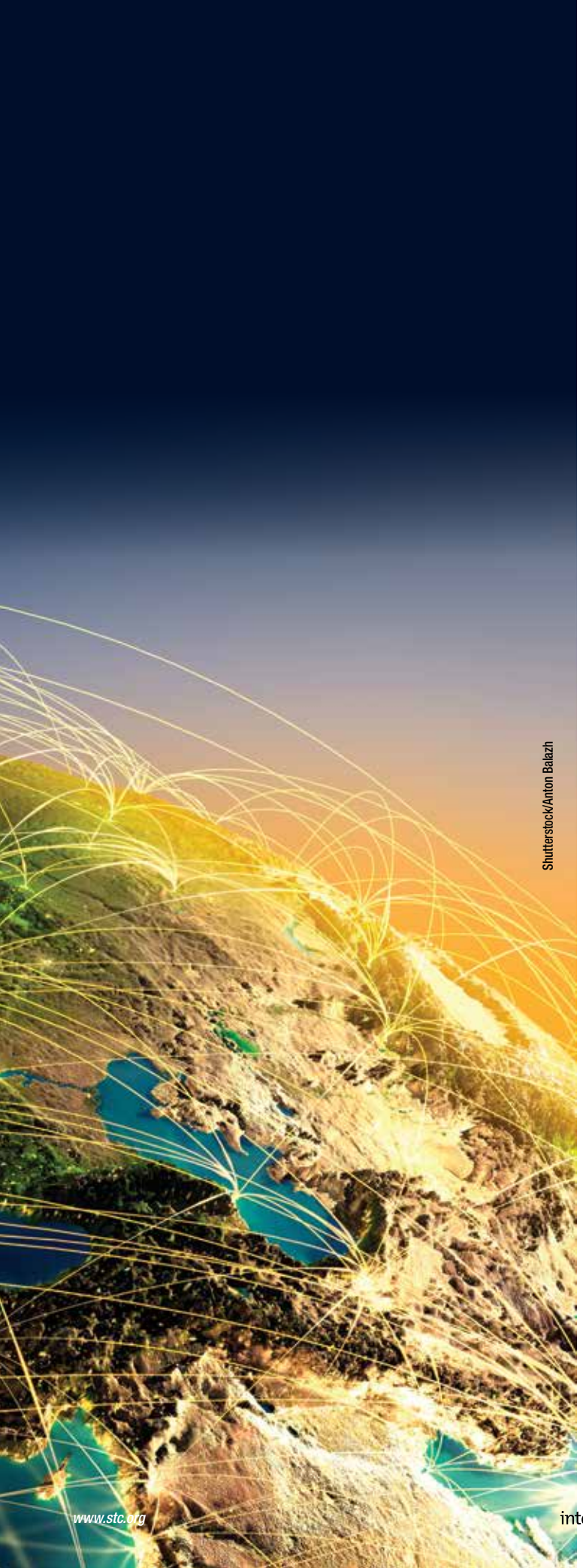
Why You Need a Global Content Strategy

By VAL SWISHER



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I'VE BEEN RESEARCHING, speaking about, writing articles and books on, and creating global content strategies for years. During this time, the amount of content that companies translate and the number of languages that companies translate into have grown. And the need for companies to have a global content strategy has exponentiated. As I've often said, if you add four languages, your tasks to manage that content don't increase by a multiple of four. They exponentiate to the fourth power.

Yet, I still find that there are many companies that embark on translation without having a good plan. Sometimes, they get lucky and things turn out okay—for a while. Sometimes, they learn their lessons early. But 100 percent of the time, there is a point at which operating a global content machine breaks down if you do not have a solid plan for where you are, where you need to go, and what you need to do to get there.

In this article, I cover the basics of a global content strategy:

- What it is;
- Why it is important; and
- How to prepare.

So let's get started, shall we?

What Is a Global Content Strategy?

A global content strategy is a plan for managing content that is intended for people whose main language is something other than the source language.

Your global content strategy should have three parts:

- Understanding the goals that your strategy needs to achieve.
- Knowing your starting point.
- Analyzing the gap between where you are and where you need to be.

Understand the goals that your strategy needs to achieve. Before you can build any strategy, you must understand its goals. Without goals, how will you know if you are successful? Part of this understanding needs to be an analysis of the business drivers behind the strategy. For example, is your company venturing into particular markets for the first time? Do you have a strategic customer that is demanding a particular translation? Is all of your content going to be translated, or just some? Is it a one-for-one (all content into all languages), some content into one group of languages, or other content into a different group?

Be sure to define success up front. Perhaps success is publishing a certain set of content into a specific set of languages by a certain date. Perhaps it is broader, such as identifying content that is going to be translated, selecting a translation partner, and setting up the systems and processes you will need to support the translation and localization process.

Once you define your immediate goals, consider future goals. Scale and extensibility are keys to a successful global content strategy. You might be starting with four languages today, but in the future you'll likely be looking at eight, then twelve, and who knows how many languages further down the road. If you plan for the future, you will be in much better shape when you get there.

Know your starting point. Once you have defined the future, you need to analyze where you are today. Are you currently translating content in an ad hoc way? Do you already have a localization services provider (LSP)? Are different regions in your company creating translations (with or without permission)? Perhaps you have set up an initial workflow for translation—what about it works now? What doesn't? Which parts are scalable?

Analyze the gap between where you are and where you need to be. How far off from your goals are you now? Do you think you can achieve your goals rather easily? Or do you think that your goals and today's reality are miles apart and that you have a lot of work to do to bridge the gap?

Sometimes the task of analyzing the gap can be overwhelming. Maybe you don't know where to begin. Maybe things are so far down a suboptimal path that you are at a loss as to how you might regroup for success.

Try to organize your analysis so that the task of identifying the gap is manageable. You might consider these areas:

- **Workflow or process:** What new or changed workflows do you need to support your global content strategy?
- **People:** Do you have the people in place to manage the workflows?
- **Partners:** Have you identified partners, such as LSPs?
- **Systems:** What tools and infrastructure changes do you need?
- **Content:** How can you improve the quality of your source content before it is translated?

Don't be afraid to seek help. There are several books on the market you can read, lots of articles and webinars you can view, and professionals who specialize in helping to create a scalable, achievable global content strategy.

Why Is a Global Content Strategy Important?

There are many reasons to have a global content strategy. Perhaps you have been tasked with adding languages for your content, and you have no plan. Or you have already started translating content, and you have no plan. Or perhaps you're not translating content, and you believe that no one else, such as your customer, is translating it either.

Here are some common issues that can be addressed by a global content strategy. Even if you have only one of the factors listed below, it is important to strategically manage all the moving parts in the global content workflow. Otherwise, you are likely wasting time and money and achieving lower quality content that your customers might not be able to understand, regardless of what language it's in.

You translate content into four or more languages. In my experience, after you hit four languages, you'd better start managing your global content strategically. Many companies chose to implement a global content strategy with three languages. If you are in a situation where the number of languages will grow, it is never too early to plan to manage that growth.

Multiple groups in your company translate content independently. Often multiple groups translate content with no coordination—or even awareness—between the groups. I've seen product groups release datasheets or Web pages in multiple languages without anyone in marketing ever participating in a review.

International offices are creating content in their native languages, and no one in the main corporate organization sees it or knows about it. I've seen sales teams located in Asia, for example, create their own materials without informing the localization team in the United States. It's common—and often beneficial—for regions to create unique content in their native languages. After all, who knows a market better than the people who live there? It's still important for you to know where all of your source content is, who is managing it, how many languages it is in, and where all of that translated content lives.

You don't know the name of the head of localization. If you are responsible for content—any content—that is being translated, you must have a direct line to your localization team. Siloed efforts at translation and localization might work for a while, but eventually they fail.

You have so many translation vendors that you can't remember which ones you sent what content to. Many large companies work with more than one translation vendor. That's a common practice. Unfortunately, I've seen companies work with so many translation vendors that they can't keep track of who is translating what. This lack of coordination results in some content being translated multiple times and some content never making it to translation. In some cases, the lack of coordination can even delay a product launch.

You don't know what TM stands for. TM stands for *translation memory*. If your content is being translated, you need to understand what TM is and how it works. You also need to manage your TMs. Having multiple vendors, each using its own version of your TM, can be ridiculously expensive and can create mismatched translations and overall confusion. Know where your TMs are, and keep them to a minimum. In an ideal world, you have a single TM, owned by you, and used by all your translation vendors.

You are considering using machine translation. There are different kinds of *machine translation* (MT). Traditional systems include statistical, rule-based, and hybrid machine translation. Even more exciting is the newest member of the machine translation family: neural machine translation.

Significant advances in artificial intelligence, machine learning, and natural language processing have made it an exciting time to be evaluating neural MT. MT systems can be complicated and expensive. To do it right, you need to use best-of-breed MT software and have experts help configure the software for your content. Better yet, you need to work with a best-in-class translation partner who can offer you the latest and greatest solutions for your MT needs.

You have tried using Google Translate for real work. Many companies think that using free machine translation software is good enough. While it has gotten better, it is still not good enough for your mission-critical content, and if your customers are using Google Translate for your content, you have no idea what messages they are getting.

Preparing to Create a Global Content Strategy

Creating a global content strategy can be an onerous task. However, there are some things you can do right away to help prepare for the process. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

Learn the Lingo

Like all industries, translation has its own terminology. If you are new to the practice, be sure you learn the basic terms you will need to know. For example:

- Translation
- Localization
- Transcreation
- Translation memory
- Machine translation
- Translation management
- Translation unit

Write for Translation

So much of the content we create today is impossible or near impossible to translate. We use jargon, idioms, and other phraseology that makes no sense in another language. Regardless of whether you are translating today or not, you will do your readers a great service by making your content global ready. Global-ready content is:

- Easy to read in any language, including English;
- Easy and fast to translate by hand or by machine; and
- Higher quality and much more likely to result in accurate translations.

Here are some basic things that you can do to make your source content global ready:

- Write shorter sentences.
- Write less content.
- Say the same thing, the same way, every time you say it.
- Avoid idioms and jargon.
- Manage your English terminology.
- Use correct grammar.
- Deploy the right tools to create and manage your content.
- Collaborate with others.

Locate Your Content

Audit your content to determine:

- What content you have;
- Where it is;
- Who created it;
- Who is translating it;
- What languages it is being translated into; and
- Who is reviewing the translations.

Review Your Imagery

Be careful with images, maps, and flags. You can easily overstep your bounds and accidentally include offensive content where you least expect it.

Be aware of hand gestures, symbols, icons, and inappropriate imagery.

Understand Transcreation

Not all content can or should be translated. Sometimes, content needs to be written for a specific region, country, or culture. This is called *transcreation*. Learn about it, and be aware of when it makes sense to spend money on language-specific content.

Summary

At some point in your company's growth, there is a very high likelihood that you will need to translate content. Before you download Google Translate and have at it, I highly recommend creating a global content strategy.

Having a global content strategy will:

- Save you a lot of time now and later;
- Save money;
- Help ensure your translations are the highest possible quality; and
- Help you keep your sanity (and maybe your job).

It takes a lot of work to create a robust, scalable, global content strategy. It is important to understand the goals of the strategy, where you are today, and how you are going to bridge the gap to fulfill the vision of where you need to be.

However, the time and work it takes will pay off many times over as your company grows and your global presence expands.

VAL SWISHER (vals@contentrules.com) *is the Founder and CEO of Content Rules, Inc. Val enjoys helping companies solve complex content problems. She is a well-known expert in content strategy, structured authoring, global content, content development, and terminology management. Val believes content should be easy to read, cost-effective to create and translate, and efficient to manage. Her customers include industry giants such as Google, Cisco, Visa, Facebook, and Juniper Networks. She's the author of three books. Her latest book,* Global Content Strategy: A Primer *is an introduction to creating and managing global content.*

Localising —or Is That Localizing— Content within a Language

By RAHEL ANNE BAILIE | *STC Fellow*

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IN A SENSE, I've always been an outsider. I started life in a completely bilingual, double-culture household, where my great-grandmother spoke no English, my father spoke no Slovak, and my mother and grandparents could communicate in both languages. My cultural references were different from my schoolmates, separated by an obscure religion and my parents' decision to remove our television, the cultural binding of the 1960s. Upon graduating from high school, I moved to Montreal, where the English-French divide was at its peak, around the time that Bill 22 made French the official language of Québec, and I became an anglophone amongst the francophones. Then, I moved to Vancouver, a city of immigrants, where residents of European background hover just under 50 percent. And I loved it.

The great and subtle differences of culture and in use of language was an ongoing source of intrigue for me. As my vocabulary adapted from Frenglish, where I would "shoot" things into the garbage can (jeter à la poubelle) or "open" the light (ouvrir la lumière) to more British Columbian idiom, and my diction changed my pronunciation of Van-coo-ver to Van-kew-ver and my "eh" to "heh," I thought I was quite resilient. I learned how to greet people and count in Cantonese, and I learned the names of vegetables from the local greengrocer, where Punjabi was the lingua franca.

Now, I live in London, where you can hear a dozen different languages and accents on a single bus ride. And whilst [while] I consider myself relatively articulate, my Canadian English often feels like a different language from the mother tongue of British English. I thought I was good at doing cross-cultural translation. After all, Canada's proximity to the United States means being inundated with American language variations. I could easily translate "how y'all doing?" to "how are you?" in my brain, but had to ask a co-worker the right response to "y'alright?" when asked that each morning in the English Midlands. (By the way, y'alright is the equivalent to "how are you," and the correct answer is "yeah, y'alright?".)

What was more disturbing was to have my business correspondence corrected. "I'll have her call you" was considered too American, and changed to "I'll ask her to call you." Ending my emails with "Cheers" was corrected because that's specifically East London; the suggested substitution was "Best regards." I couldn't bring myself to use that because whilst [while] it might be common in the UK, in North America, it's considered a quaint holdover from letter-writing. But as I've learned to say, "it's all swings and roundabouts in the end, innit?"

Localisation [Localization] in the Early Days of the Web

Take yourself back to the late 1990s. The United States is the centre [center] of the internet universe. The novelty of selling flowers from Hawaii online is giving way to more commercial endeavours [endeavors]. The need to localise [localize] a website for use by Canadians hasn't been addressed yet. So a typical purchase transaction went something like this:

1. Choose item and add it to the shopping basket, mentally calculating the $USD to $CAD.
2. Fill in the payment details until you get to the last line of the address, where you are expected to pick up the cognitive load of translating "zip code" into "postal code," and try to enter an alpha-numeric value (ANA NAN) into a form field intended for numbers only (NNNNN). And fail.
3. Call the support number, where the representative cheerfully informs you that they use 99999 as the zipcode for all of Canada.
4. Enter 99999 as your postal code, and then see that the item in question is not available for postage and packaging (known as shipping and handling in North America) or will be exorbitantly expensive to send across the border.

These interactions happened in a time when field testing documents was common but usability for websites was in its infancy. There was an assumption that the market was a reflection of the developers: middle-class, native-English-speaking, able-bodied, non-colour[color]-blind Americans. The solipsism was quite obvious: Canadians were given the privilege of using the site if they were willing to accept American spelling, idiom, currency, and addressing conventions. Catering to other English-speaking countries was not seen as a priority. The market was firmly positioned for an in-country market, sometimes even excluding Alaska and Hawaii.

Even when a company recognised [recognized] the need for a multi-country site, companies recognised [recognized] that the effort was significant. In a Web 1.0 world, the options for delivering page-based content was limited to page-level copy-and-paste exercises, where content was manually updated to meet legal, regulatory, or cultural needs. In fact, in this article, I've purposely retained my British voice and casual-professional tone to reflect how the media available to us in the late 1990s restricted our ability to localise [localize] for multiple audiences. It's distracting at best, and confounding at worst. No matter which audience we decided to serve, we inevitably excluded multiple other audiences.

Same-Language Localisation [Localization] Today

Fast forward twenty years, marketing has gone global, and the content landscape has seen dramatic changes.

On the presentation side, we've gone from single delivery to a more-or-less standard computer monitor display size to multiple deliveries, using responsive design, which accommodates displays of all sizes. We can accommodate everything from super-large television screens to the smallest of wearables, from public-space kiosks to auto-delivered content into IoT devices.

On the content side, we've seen the need to create adaptive content to accommodate a broader range of delivery targets and user needs. But it's not as simple as delivering content for different screen sizes. The content itself needs to be localised [localized] for a variety of needs across the globe. The harsh reality is that the days when companies could publish instructions in American English and with an American context, and expect consumers to bear the heavy cognitive load, are over. Companies that use International English have also discovered that American audiences are the most demanding when it comes to expecting culturally-specific content. The demand for localised [localized] content is strong in the United States.

Same-Language Localisation [Localization] for Fun and Profit

Did the title of this section make sense to you? If you are from North America, "for fun and profit" is a familiar phrase, often used ironically. Outside of western, industrialised [industrialized] countries, the phrase would be read as a statement; the ironic context would be lost. Living with a Kenyan flatmate for two years made me aware of just how much of our language is specific to a culture, a country, or a set of laws, even when it comes to content that we might consider relatively dry. There is no such thing as generic English.

Here are the top areas where content needs to be localised [localized].

Measurements

This is the most obvious example of the need to localise [localize]. North America uses a 110 volt grid, whereas the rest of the world uses 220 volt. (I fried 3 GPS—or SatNav—luggage trackers—before I figured out that the company was sending me a tracker meant for the North American market.) Temperatures are in Centigrade, unless in the United States. Recipes are interesting, because each country measures slightly differently. In the United States, it's Imperial cups and ounces. In Canada, it's metric cups and ounces. In the UK and EU, it's grams and millilitres [millileters], with some sites offering conversions between measuring units. Distances need to be converted from miles to kilometres [kilometers], feet to metres [meters], and inches to centimetres [centimeters].

Currency

Monetary units need to be localised [localized], which may seem obvious. It's particularly important when units share a common name, such as a dollar. Is that a Canadian dollar, a U.S. dollar, or a New Zealand dollar? The same goes for dinars, francs, and pesos. When we say "a penny for your thoughts," how does that resonate with an audience for whom "penny" is not a common term, or will it resonate with the next generation of Canadians, now that Canada has phased out pennies altogether?

The harsh reality is that the days when companies could publish instructions in American English and with an American context, and expect consumers to bear the heavy cognitive load, are over.

Terms and Metaphors

A long while back, I saw an eBay ad asking for a replacement mirror for a driver's side door—and you can guess what happened when the British seller sent the mirror to the American buyer. A driver-side mirror in the UK is a passenger-side mirror in the United States. Using driving metaphors can be effective, but that content needs to be localised [localized] when intended for use in countries where driving is on the opposite side of the road. It's not enough to simply assume that the product is a mirror image. In the UK, the driver gets in on the right-hand side of the car to drive on the left-hand side of the road, but the gas pedal is in the same position as for a car being driven on the right-hand side of the road.

There are a lot of automobile metaphors that simply don't translate well—both literally and culturally. You probably know that a car's "trunk" is a "boot," a "hood" is a "bonnet," and a "windshield" is a "windscreen," but do you know the difference between saloon and estate cars? Using the term "soccer mom van" would fall flat in countries where soccer is football, a minivan is an MPV, and "white van man" is a stereotype for the vehicle driven by a trades-person, typically a smallish white van.

Location-Based Terminology

When I tell people that a friend left London to move to Georgia, I automatically specify "the country, not the state" to avoid confusion. When you list your addresses, do you specify the country, as well as the city? There are 18 locations called London in the United States alone, and another nine places called London around the world, aside from the most famous city of London in the UK.

While I've been using the UK and the United States as counterpoints to demonstrate the need for same-language localisation [localization], I should point out that addressing varies wildly around the world, as Google Maps discovered when trying to provide directions in India. There, the use of landmarks is more important than building numbers—a friend listed her snail mail address with the apartment and the intersection the building was on followed by "upstairs from Pizza Express" before the name of the city.

Wayfinding for buildings is another area of potential confusion. Someone recently faulted me for not including the name of my building when I gave directions: "You left out the most important part!" I can attest to the fact that the physical addressing of buildings in Central London still confuses me. Not only do building numbers sometimes go up one side of the street, then down the other side—putting number 61 across from number 12, for example—but the four streets surrounding a square all bear the same name. This system is completely obvious to a UK resident, but confounds a North American who is used to each of the four streets having unique names.

Another example of location-based localisation [localization] is the use of the word "estate," which means the same as "subdivision" in North America, where an estate is more likely to mean a mansion on a large piece of property. This mansion would have a ground floor, also called the first floor in North America, whereas in the UK and Europe, the first floor of a building is *above* the ground floor, which can create some confusion when giving directions.

Cultural Localisations [Localizations]

This category contains the widest range of language and is the most problematic area if not localised [localized] well. Earlier, I referred to the difference between the use of "shipping and handling" in North America and "postage and packaging" in the UK—it's called "postage and handling" in Australia. This difference in terminology can get confusing for users, especially considering that audiences aren't always native speakers of any kind of English in the first place.

Culture comes out in many ways, and as companies are using UX writers to create "on brand" copy, such as error messages and disclaimers, the likelihood of losing your audience increases exponentially.

One example of a culturally-specific disclaimer reads like this:

> *This week's fine print is brought to you by our middle school '90s mixtape. Press play and enjoy: It's been, one week since the return of the mack. No diggity, this is how we do it. I've been kissed by a rose, but you're my own worst enemy. MMMBop. Every little step I take, you say, I only hear what I want to. Look, if it makes you happy, push it. Now, my love, do you ever dream of candy-coated raindrops? Kriss Kross might make you jump jump (sic), but our lawyers will make you read read (sic): This $2 coupon expires on Sunday, September 18th, 2016 at 11:59 PM PST. You must have a Yelp Eat24 account to use our code….*

I'm sure that there are many cultural references in that paragraph, but most of it went over my head, and if the service was offered in another country, it would be meaningless. We sprinkle idiom throughout our work without realising [realizing] that this becomes bespoke content—or "custom-made"—and may be unintentionally offensive. It's not as simple as the difference between saying "pants," which are "slacks" in North America but "underwear" in the UK, unless you say that something *is* pants, in which case you mean that it's worthless, similar to "that sucks." In some countries, humour [humor] runs to slapstick, while that falls flat in other markets. The English used in North American might not work in Dubai, for example, because the cultural and linguistic expectations work hand-in-hand, so localising [localizing] means understanding the culture well to get the details right.

Different countries have different expectations. Chui Chui Tan, a UX professional specialising [specializing] in international business, describes the differences between expectations for localisation [localization] in different Asian countries, such as China, Japan, Malaysia, and Singapore. These differences can range from how employees expect to report incidents through their intranets to how technical information is organised [organized] on a website. The nuances that intersect culture and language make localisation [localization] an interesting, and necessary, step of the publishing process.

As I embark on a new career in healthcare, I've been reading about medical terminology and how it differs from culture to culture. Anatomy may be universal, but it seems that the terms for each body part, the equipment used in surgeries (the operations, not the clinics), and the pharmaceuticals used to treat patients all have enough variation that good localisation [localization] can literally mean the difference between life and death. Or, combining localisation [localization] with translation, it means the difference between amputating the left leg or the correct one.

Conclusion

It may seem that as brands like Disney and Netflix go global, cultural references will smoothly translate from one culture to another. However, just as entertainment is becoming more niche—for example, gamers will have reference points that no one else will get, as will sports fans, arts lovers, and so on—so is the potential idiom that sneaks into the language we use. The need for same-language localisation [localization] is becoming more relevant as markets mature, and as content developers, we really do need to watch our language.

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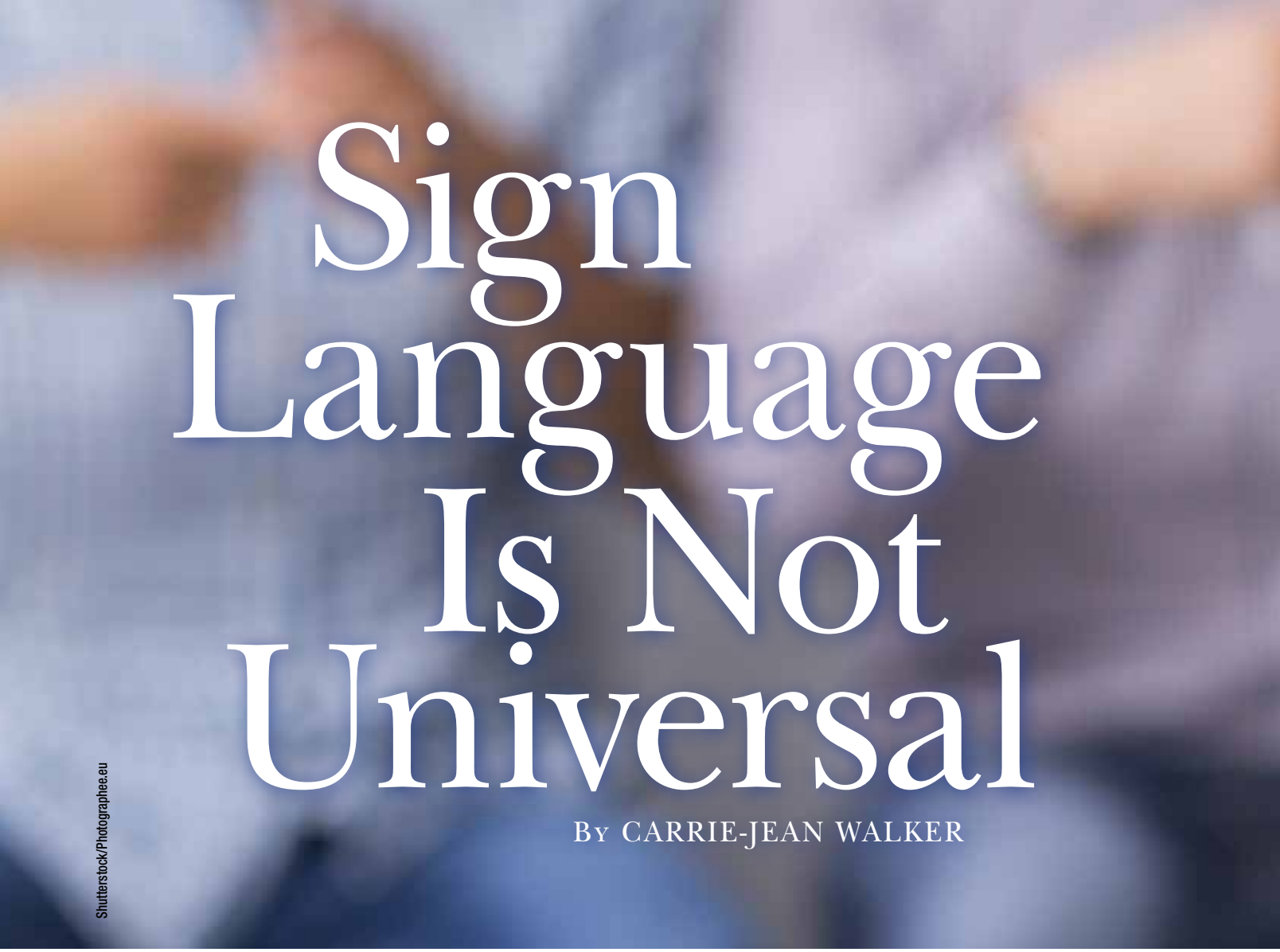

Sign Language Is Not Universal

By CARRIE-JEAN WALKER

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MORE THAN FIVE PERCENT of the world's population—or 466 million people—has disabling hearing loss. That is 432 million adults and 34 million children. It is estimated that by 2050, over 900 million people—or one in every ten people—will have disabling hearing loss.

I have a Deaf son. I'm American and Swedish. We've lived in Sweden, and we now live in France. We learned Swedish Sign Language (Teckenspråk) in Sweden, and of course, now we are morphing into French Sign Language (Langue des Signes Française or LSF) to communicate here.

French Sign Language is the native language of approximately 100,000 native signers in France. It's also one of the earliest European sign languages to gain acceptance by educators, and it influenced other sign languages like ASL, ISL, and Russian Sign Language (RSL).

We are bilingual in sign language—Swedish and French. This leads to all kinds of rather extraordinary cultural experiences. When I explain this, I'm often asked, "But I thought sign language was universal?" This is a story about how sign language is not the same everywhere.

This is an important topic in the Deaf world, as I've learned about from being involved in the Deaf community. First of all, we all know that oral languages are not universal. Why should signed languages be? A giant, Hearing linguist didn't one day use his language skills to magically create an official form of communication for all Deaf people. They've been able to communicate from the beginning—they just can't hear. In fact, new sign languages frequently evolve amongst groups of deaf children and adults.

In fact, there are more signed languages than oral languages. There's a simple reason for this: it's a basic human instinct to communicate with others, and the Deaf have traditionally been segregated from mainstream Hearing society for lots of reasons. They were often found on the outside of the action, isolated in groups who developed their own means of communicating. The groups were smaller, however, so there were more of them, and they developed with their own variations, as any language does.

Sign Language Is Not a Word-for-Word Version of Oral Language

The most common misconception about signed languages seems to be that they are a signed, word-for-word version of the local or dominant oral language. This is not at all the case. They are organic languages with their own grammars: phonology (yes!), syntax, morphology, and pragmatics.

Hand and finger shape and position in front of the body, as well as facial expressions, all matter for meaning. Being visual, they use different means to create poetry, for example, and some of it is pretty funny!

Americans and Brits are often said to be "divided by a common language," but the deaf communities in the two countries don't have a common language. British Sign Language (BSL) and American Sign Language (ASL) are not even in the same language family.

Today, as another example, most people in Ireland speak English. But Deaf people in Ireland use Irish Sign Language (ISL), which is actually derived from French Sign Language.

An interesting footnote about ISL: many Irish deaf students were educated in Catholic schools that separated students by gender. So for a time, men and women each had their own dialects of ISL. These differences have diminished over time with more integration.

No Standard, International Signed Language

In an effort to relieve this confusion, someone (maybe that giant, hearing linguist?) tried to invent an international signed language, called Gestuno, but the naturally evolved signed languages won out. I don't know much about it, because like Esperanto, it isn't practiced as a first language, and not many people know it in addition to their own signed language, and it never replaced the natural ones.

ASL is probably the most universally used for the same reasons that spoken English is present in cross-cultural communication. ASL isn't an official standard; however, the only Deaf university in the world is in Washington, DC, and ASL definitely dominates the Web in terms of information available. ASL is claimed by some to be the third most commonly used language in the United States.

Things have changed rapidly. I remember an elderly Deaf woman in Sweden telling me that perhaps 50 years ago, she and her classmates were required to sit on their hands in Deaf schools as kids so that they wouldn't sign amongst themselves. In Sweden, you can now choose your official "mother tongue" with the government, so you can have information in your own language, and Swedish Sign Language is one of the choices. All government websites and other official information have sign language as an option in their communication. You can request an interpreter from the government to interpret meetings held by your local governmental administration.

This is in contrast with Denmark, where the advances in technological solutions (and lots of hearing aid companies) have inspired a different approach. There is more emphasis on improving one's ability to hear through hearing aids and cochlear implants, to help with integration in mainstream society. It is true that signing sets the Deaf apart from the Hearing world and creates its own culture, norms, and mores, but it also creates isolation from those who don't sign.

In France, things have changed more slowly, but they are progressing. French Sign Language (LSF) was not recognised as an "official" language by the government until 2005. What does it mean for LSF to be an "official language"? For one thing, it means that LSF counts for translation.

My Son: Communicating Across Deaf and Hearing Communities

My son got his cochlear implant in Sweden when he was eight years old. This is very late—they normally implant in newborns or in those who lose their hearing later in life and thus have a memory of hearing. Because we had trouble getting an implant in France, by the time we got to Sweden, he was older. But they tested him and decided he had heard enough in the womb that it would be worth it to try, even knowing that there is a high risk of rejection in a case like his. To mitigate this risk, we implanted only one side.

Well, he rejected it. He didn't like hearing. In fact, after eight years in silence, he found sounds pretty psychologically violent. It exhausted him to try to process all of that noise (even the sound of human voices was just noise to him), and he constantly asked to take them off. We insisted he keep them on at school, so the first thing he always wanted to do when he got home was to take a bath so he could take his hearers out. We continued to give him a chance to learn to hear, but in the end, he preferred to be a Sign communicator.

As a parent, my only real concern about this is that it has reduced the size of the world with which he can communicate. I speak several languages, however, and I understand that any language, no matter how small, is a gateway to communication—you just have to find the right people.

Thus I did what other parents of Deaf children do: I found a good Deaf school for him. In France, this means boarding school. As a mother, it was difficult for me to think of sending my young boy away during the week. Did he really need to leave home so young, just because he's Deaf? Not fair, I thought.

The first week of school was hard. I was sure he was confused and overwhelmed.

When he returned home on Friday afternoon, I learned that it was not so hard for him! He was like a fish who had moved from a bowl to a pond. He could communicate with people other than just me! They understood him! And they signed back! He was telling me about his roommate, the school park, the food, the structure of his week, the sports, his teachers… All of these are things he would have communicated with only me in the past, and now he has a whole community.

He still can only communicate effectively with a small community, of course, but it's the size of a whole school system, and they know each other well, because they consider it their own distinct culture. They come attached to whole families and a larger community of Signers.

When he comes home and is out in the wider community, he is still limited to me and his brother for more than the most basic communication, but this is less important now, as he doesn't expect others to speak his language, and he's not dependent on that. This makes all the difference. He gets along with Hearing people just fine, as long as they are willing to slow down a little and accommodate a language barrier. He loves to socialize and observe and mimic and imitate—and he's found a way to do it all without exchanging an oral word. He has somewhere to go to talk about things now.

On the tramway in our city, we often run into Deaf people. We recognize each other, because we're signing or because they're gesturing at their phones. This always leads to a conversation. Inevitably, someone will then ask us why we're saying this or that using such a funny sign. We explain that we learned to sign in Sweden, and they chuckle about our "accent."

The Benefits of Being Multi-Lingual—Speaking and Signing

I've gone from a childhood in the United States with one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, to France, where the numbers are much smaller, then to Sweden, with only 9 million people. But that wasn't enough; we had to choose a language that only one percent of those 9 million people can use. We are very elite indeed!

Over time, we've developed a sort of creole at home. We probably still use Swedish Sign as our base, on which we build French signs and grammar, but like every family, we have our own vocabulary that comes from living together and in lots of different places. I think only three people in the world really sign like we do, but we have the capacity to understand a lot more of what other people are signing. This makes it really fun to eavesdrop.

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CJ is Past President of STC's Transalpine Chapter, Past President of TCEurope, current member of Council at ISTC as International Rep, a member of the Information 4.0 consortium, and an organizer of many educational conferences in the field. She's passionate about the techcomm field and works to build community and visibility for content's place in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

So You Think You're Ready to Work Abroad?

Tips for Moving to Another Country for Work

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By MARK CLIFFORD | *STC Associate Fellow*

AT SOME POINT in life, almost everyone either has to—or wants to—change locations for a career move. Whether it's after graduation or later in your career, changing states or cities can be a real necessity to secure your ideal job. At other times, you might just think, "Wouldn't it be great to live and work in another country?"

I've lived and worked in five countries, and being a citizen of a European Union (EU) country (at least for the moment) made the process a lot easier for me to get visas and work permits. The biggie was moving to the United States, and getting an initial L1 visa, followed by my Green Card. For most Americans, the same is true when moving to Europe for work. Many things are possible with the right approach!

I'm not going to discuss working holidays or jobs with volunteer agencies in this article. This discussion is for those who, like I did, want to move abroad for career enhancement and personal growth.

Here are a few tips to help you decide if life in another country is for you. It's definitely not the definitive guide, more like food for thought or a "can I crack it" sketch with pointers.

Decide Where You'd Like to Live

As with all life-changing decisions, you must be realistic. A bad choice now will ruin the opportunity and might leave you scarred for life! Certainly, you can be adventurous, but you also need to choose wisely. Ask yourself some searching questions.

Am I risk averse? If so, pick somewhere that you feel confident about, maybe a country and city you have visited on vacation, or where you speak the language. Trying to acclimate to a new job and company can be hard enough. When you add new language, new culture, new social scene, new schools, and so on, the stress and pressures can really mount up. Look for a country you will feel at home in. If you have family in a country, they can often ease the burden, at least for the first months while you settle in.

Will I, and my family, be happy there? Unhappy families can be a big problem in a new location. Your focus will be on work, and while you'll spend as much time as possible with the family, they'll have to cope all day, five days a week. For your own peace of mind, you'll want to ensure that you and your family are settled and comfortable in the new environment.

Research Those Countries

Involve the family in the initial discussions and planning. There's probably nothing worse than dropping a bombshell like, "I've accepted a great job in Luton, England," and then listening to the stunned silence and the almost certain, accusatory question, "Where the heck is that? I've never heard of it!" Guaranteed, you are off to a rocky start.

If you've been offered a job already, sell the location to them, but be realistic, and don't over sell it. Get them doing research on the place, so they can discover what's good about it, and they will sell it to themselves.

The Web is a wonderful place to get information on countries, their cultures, infrastructure, and schooling—including the downsides. Inside 10 minutes, the family will likely know more about Luton (or wherever) than you do!

As part of your research, check requirements for your spouse or partner to work if required. This is *important*!

After job availability, the biggest concern will be money, especially that thorny issue of cost of living (CoL). Think of it like moving from Maine to California in the United States. Your earnings may be higher, but does that compensate for higher costs? How far will my local salary go here? What about my standard of living? And if your partner won't be working, what is the impact of that?

As an indicator, Luton has an approximately 23 percent lower CoL than Boston, MA in the United States. The average technical communicator salaries are $45,000 and $68,000, respectively. Cambridge, UK (salary: $55,000) is 19 percent higher than Oklahoma City, OK (salary: $42,000).

The next consideration is language. Unless you're moving to an English-speaking country, a working knowledge of another language is imperative for your survival. You may not need to speak another language for work, but you and your family will need to use it every day!

Younger children will soak up a new language, but for teens and adults, learning is harder, so lessons are a must—both before you go and after you arrive in your new home.

Talk to people you know who have made the move already. Use their knowledge to ease your own transition. Listen to their comical horror stories; they may seem funny now, but at the time, I bet they were causing heart failure!

Make a plan, allow plenty of time, and don't expect overnight miracles.

Move with Your Current Employer, or Do It Yourself?

The easiest way, from the visa/work permit aspect, is to move with your current employer. Here are some things to consider if you take this route.

What will your employer cover or help with? Benefits may differ depending on whether it's your request or their desire that you relocate. The heyday of the expat package is long gone. Unless you're working for the government or military, visa sponsorship and relocation are probably the most you can expect.

If your company wants you to move, you may be able to negotiate a better deal, possibly including things like property rental costs, school fees, or similar large scale costs, especially if you will be on a local salary base.

Finding a Job Before You Move

This can be a time-consuming activity. You will need sponsorship from a prospective employer. When searching job boards, look for those with "applicants who require a work visa welcomed" or similar wording. These companies have a positive attitude toward immigration and sponsoring visa applications. It won't make the process quicker, just smoother.

Depending on your relationship with your current employer, you might want to let them know your intentions—but don't give up your job before you're ready to move! If they are considering you for training, promotion, or similar, and you're leaving, that could impact their decisions. It could even give them ideas for employing you in your new location!

You should be also prepared to fund a trip, either for an interview or to scout the place. Phone or Skype interviews may take place initially, but a face-to-face interview is usually required.

Use all your resources to find a job. The main job boards like Monster, Indeed, or Glassdoor will have overseas jobs, but try their country extensions (.co.uk; .nl; .de) to get to the locally advertised jobs. As part of your research, look up other indigenous job boards. A Google search of local technical writing jobs will usually give you several job boards, a few agencies, and a number of direct job advertisements.

You can register with local employment agencies, but don't get high hopes that they can do anything quickly. Agencies depend on their clients' willingness to sponsor applicants, and such companies are few.

Use your network, as well, whether personal contacts, LinkedIn, or the multiplicity of social media channels now available. You never know who might know of a perfect job available in your preferred country.

Getting a Visa

Whether you're working the "corporate nine to five" or you're lucky enough to be a digital nomad working from a Wi-Fi enabled beach hut, you will still need to have a valid work visa.

Visa requirements can be a minefield. Although some countries are easier than others for U.S. citizens to relocate, to most will have complicated and lengthy visa application processes.

The easier countries for extended stays (not work) include: Sweden, Mexico, Ireland, Canada, New Zealand, Spain, and Svalbard in Norway. (However, you may not wish to consider Svalbard!)

Interestingly, several countries offer freelancer or digital nomad visas.

My simplest advice is:

- Check government websites for working visa criteria.
- Make sure you have all the necessary certificates—birth, marriage—and qualifications.
- If necessary, talk to an immigration lawyer.

One of the easier ways to get a visa is to claim ancestry rights via a parent or grandparent born in that country. Criteria for this is usually on the government website. Not all countries offer this, and some restrict it to the paternal side only.

Where to Live

Once you know you're moving, you'll need to decide where to live. Unless you have a real aversion, my recommendation is to pick a reasonably sized urban area. Transport infra-

structures in rural areas can be erratic, and without a car (if you're commuting to work in it), just getting to the local supermarket is virtually impossible.

Regarding shopping, you can expect to pay more for your food than normal while you settle in. All those new and exciting foods you'll want to try, even if (like Marmite) it's only once. I've found this lasts from one to three months, depending on your culinary adventurousness.

Eating out is generally more expensive in Europe. It may be good quality, but portion sizes will be smaller too.

If your relocation is permanent, you might consider purchasing a property, but I recommend buying after you've been in a location for at least a year and you know that your family is settled. If you buy straight away, and then for whatever reason, things don't work out, you'll have the added hassle of trying to sell a property in absentia. Again, not an easy thing to do!

Here are a few additional things to think about when considering a move like this.

Trailing Spouse/Partner

From experience, I can tell you that forgetting the needs of your spouse or partner can be a deal breaker. If they work now (and assuming (s)he is not a digital nomad), chances are they'll not be working when you move, at least not in the short term.

Schooling

If you have school-aged children, this is a big consideration. There will generally be a wider choice of schools available in urban locations. International schools may be available, but they can be expensive, and they tend to be located in major cities. If you are in a non-English speaking country, I suggest local schools for younger children (under 8 years), as they'll pick up the language really quickly. Up to 13 years, it really depends on the abilities of the child whether they will learn quickly or need to go to an English-speaking school.

Pets

My advice is leave pets behind. With the exception of dogs and cats, it is extremely difficult to import animals. Quarantine is really traumatic on animals—and just as stressful for the owners. Many rental properties will have animal exclusion clauses in their contracts.

Once you've moved a family of six, two dogs, a cat, and two parrots from Europe to Texas, you'll understand!

My Stuff

Rent out your house; sell or store your car/boat/RV and all your other stuff. With the exception of laptops and PCs, most United States electrical devices won't work in Europe, for example. You may not want to ship all your furniture, but remember you could be furnishing a new home when you get there.

And Uncle Sam will still want a slice of the pie! Talk to your accountant, broker, etc., to get a clear plan for reporting double taxation, your ongoing U.S. tax liabilities, and what to do about pension, 401k, etc.

Don't Be a Wallflower!

Socialize! Get out and about, and mix! It's okay if you're single to rely on work as a social scene, but if your family's with you, then you need a social circle. School-aged children tend to generate their own social life locally, but you and, more importantly, your partner will need local friends and acquaintances, or madness and homesickness can set in.

Again, language can be a road block to socializing with the natives, so take lessons and practice. Alcohol can loosen your language inhibitions, but don't argue football (or soccer) when you've had a few too many brews—it can get heated quickly!

Settled In?

You made it! You're coping with roundabouts and wonderful new food! Now prepare for visitors, and look forward to becoming an unpaid tour guide!

Resources

Country government websites for work visa and immigration resources:

- United Kingdom: *www.gov.uk/browse/visas-immigration*
- New Zealand: *www.immigration.govt.nz*
- Svalbard: *www.sysselmannen.no/en/Visitors/Entry-and-residence/*
- Ireland: *http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Immigration%20information*
- France: *https://france-visas.gouv.fr/*
- The Netherlands: *https://www.government.nl/topics/new-in-the-netherlands/employment-permits-for-foreign-nationals*

For digital nomad and freelancers:

- *slightnorth.com/long-term-visas-for-digital-nomads/*
- *www.wherecani.live/blog/view/digital-nomads--the-self-employed-and-visas-in-europe*
- *www.inis.gov.ie/en/INIS/Pages/Stamp%200*
- *service.berlin.de/dienstleistung/305249/standort/121885/en/*

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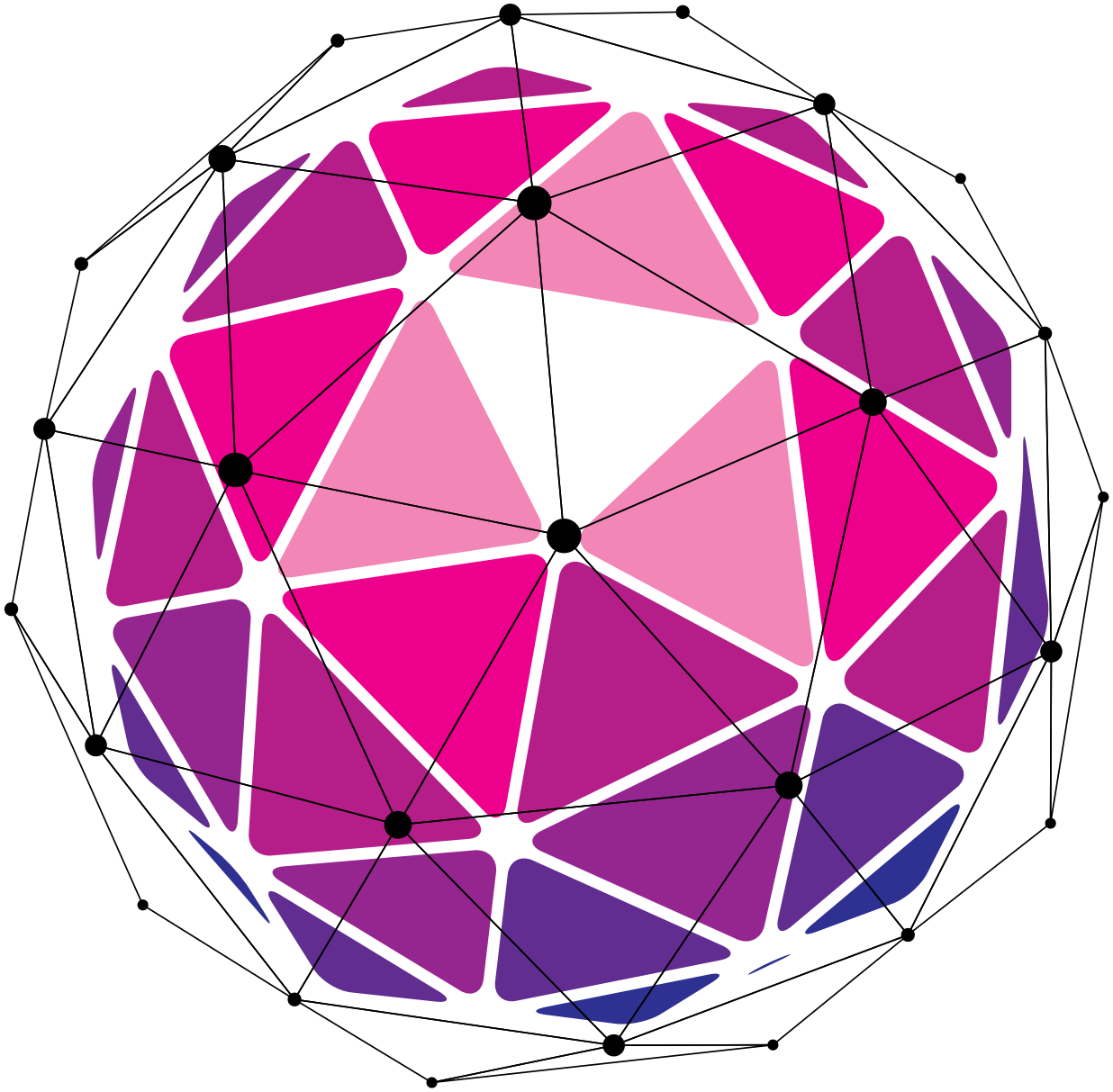

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Seeing Worldviews and You-Views

Kirk St.Amant Discusses the New Challenges of Global Communication

By SAVANNAH DEFREESE | *STC Member* and ELIZABETH SONEWALD

ALTHOUGH ARISTOTLE PROVED the earth was round in 330 BCE, modern global communication has leveled the ground once again. Technical communicators must now consider audiences at an international level, while collaborations and information exchange can happen in real time, heedless of the physical barriers of space. These modern horizons pose new challenges for the field of technical communication.

While current technical communicators can modify their expertise to accommodate this globalization, young professionals entering the field must start from square one as they acclimate to a larger, more far-reaching field than anyone before them. They must combine the experience of the past with the tools of the future.

Where do these two worlds of technical communication meet? In professionals and teachers like Dr. Kirk St.Amant. Dr. St.Amant's research offers insights on how to penetrate and become successful in this international realm of technical communication.

We interviewed Dr. St.Amant over breakfast, the morning after he arrived in Knoxville to give presentations as the Spring 2016 Rhetoric Series Speaker for the Division of Rhetoric, Writing, & Linguistics in the University of Tennessee Department of English. Rather than presenting a transcript of the interview, in this article we describe our encounter with this scholar and quote him as appropriate, as he discusses his work and ideas.

St.Amant, who specializes in the fields of technical communication and international studies, has focused his research on how to contend with these new challenges in global communication. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing the complexity of cultures, which "are composed of cultures within them."

St.Amant's research focuses on ways to communicate across these cultural layers. Two of these communication concepts, *personas* and *friction points*, provide approaches that can improve our understanding of global audiences and lead to more effective technical communication.

Personas

In this global age, communicators write for vast audiences with varying cultures, languages, and beliefs. In addition to these complex factors, communicators must now deal with multiple technologies—different devices, software interfaces, and varieties of internet and data access. Understanding the rapidly changing array of communication technologies and the emerging nuances of global audiences are essential skills for communicators.

Dr. St.Amant has researched a technique that helps communicators more effectively reach their audiences by categorizing and understanding these complexities. This technique is known as *understanding personas*.

According to St.Amant, before the advent of the personas approach, communicators relied mostly on demographic data to understand their audiences. He explained that, while demographics are critical in defining who your audience is, they are thin on context. St.Amant identifies personas as the key to contextualizing demographic data.

He described the persona method as "grafting ethnographic research onto demographics." He expanded on this, saying, "So we look at how a person lives the course of daily life, at what point in time will she use this technology, at what point in time would she access this information, and based upon that, you design not just for her but for the context in which she's using something, the context of use." This "context of use" provides communicators with a comprehensive understanding of their audience, thus equipping them to design and tailor a communication product.

Understanding personas requires careful observation and research of your audience. In his article "Designing Globally, Working Locally," St.Amant identifies what data are necessary to create a persona: demographic, contextual, behavioral, and attitudinal data. In order to collect that data, St.Amant suggests a "mixed methods approach," including surveys, observations, and interviews or focus groups to more effectively reach audiences. It is best to interact with several individuals in order to create a thorough and accurate representation of your audience (Getto and St.Amant 2014).

Though it requires meticulous research, the persona method helps communicators remember the human element of global audiences. To illustrate this, St.Amant uses an example of a reader consulting medical instructions in an emergency, saying, "Chances are, when most people turn to emergency medical instructions, are going be under duress. At that point in time, are they going to want to read a very standard generic laundry list of what to do? Or do they want information packaged in a specific way, to find it very quickly? That's the benefit a persona brings. You get to keep that human being in mind—that human being will have different emotional states, they'll be suffering different stresses and duress during the time they're using something."

In this example, the readability and accessibility of medical instructions can truly mean life or death. It is in

situations like these that the persona method becomes pivotal. It focuses on who that reader will be and equally on the possible contexts in which she will be using the instructions. In this way, St.Amant argues, the persona method helps us remember something critical about our audiences: "They are human, they're going to be under pressure from human frailties." Personas helps communicators identify the best ways to deliver information, especially as they face broader audiences.

Friction Points

St.Amant explains that, where the persona approach focuses on individuals, the concept of *friction points* builds on that hyper-focused view to encompass the global sphere. Friction points are areas that "slow or stop the flow of information," and they encompass everything from the larger legal structure to the kind of mobile technology people use in their day-to-day lives.

To illustrate how these friction points are layered, St.Amant describes a series of concentric circles. "Think of culture as existing in concentric circles that affect friction points. Let's start with the foundation: what is culture? Culture is basically a worldview. It's how you look at the world and organize stuff in it: what is worth paying attention to, what is worth talking about—that's our culture. And that, in and of itself, creates friction points, because we have different opinions. But our culture tells us, 'This is how you play nice.' And so we have rules for engagement."

St.Amant continued, "That's the primary sphere. The secondary sphere is intercultural. So you have two different cultural groups in proximity; in this case let's talk about two different cultures in the same country. In Canada: French and English. In the United States: A large Hispanic population. Two different cultures, different worldviews. Those different worldviews are going to create different friction points in terms of what we talk about and how we talk about it. What matters to me is not necessarily what matters to you, and we've got different rules of engagement. So the friction points there are cultural or linguistic.

"Now let's move to the next sphere: international. So we've moved outside of a country, and now we're talking about geopolitical spheres. Not only do I have to account for culture and language, I've also got to account for politics, economics, and geography. So those legalistic aspects, those economic aspects, become friction points.

"Let's push it all the way out: the largest sphere is global. We're going to do everything all at once, all across the world—that's infrastructure. So those infrastructures become friction points on a vast scale. The level of this concentric framework that you look at begins to reveal the friction points, and once you know the level, you can begin to identify the friction points it contains."

Summing Up

As technical communicators become more aware of existing friction points, they will be better able to address them. Focusing on friction points and personas are ways of examining both broad cultural ideas and specific, personal circumstances in order to craft effective communication.

As St.Amant explains, "The problem historically with intercultural communication has been something called the monolith—that is, all cultures have been treated like these monolithic entities. But recognizing personas and friction points and spheres is a way of looking at culture as more complex than that. We all know that cultures are comprised of cultures within them, and cultures are comprised of groups and individuals. That's where personas come in, looking more closely at people within a culture rather than letting them be faceless entities, demographic statistics. And friction points: what kinds of *different* experiences do different individuals in different cultures encounter as a result of their different worldviews? These approaches help defeat the monolithic approach, where communication is ineffectively generalized. So that's kind of the big challenge: How do we break up the monolith and become more effective communicators on a global scale?"

The struggles that St.Amant describes are sure to continue as technology continues to pull the edges of the earth closer together. As he says, "That's a phenomenon that happens with every generation, but between my generation and yours, the speed with which it has happened and the global proliferation is incredible, and my generation can't keep pace with it. It's extremely challenging to understand these dynamics, but it requires these kinds of partnerships, where generations have to work together to do these things."

Constantly changing and emerging technologies, economic shifts, and cultural differences will continue to create friction, but generational partnerships—and new approaches to communication—offer solutions. Awareness of friction points and personas provides analytical tools for emerging technical communicators who must grapple with the benefits and challenges created by our exciting global connections.

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RESOURCES

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STC Roundtable

HAVE YOU BEEN enjoying the past several months of Roundtable for free? Roundtable is a new subscription-based educational offering from STC that is separate from STC membership. Roundtable provides ongoing professional development in the form of fresh, high-quality content for 12 months on topics relevant to technical communicators and curated by well-known experts.

If you'd like to see what Roundtable can offer before signing up, you can view one month of free Roundtable content at *https://www.stc.org/roundtable/future-of-tech-comm/*.

Officially subscribe for access in September and beyond! For a limited time, STC is offering a special **Founders'** Roundtable subscription for an annual fee of only $350, giving you access to content worth more than $1,500.

Not yet convinced? Here's a list of the content that's been featured in Roundtable since its launch in March. By registering, you'll gain complete access to all of this content, plus all future content for the next year.

- **March:** The Future of Technical Communication, curated by Scott Abel, "The Content Wrangler," an internationally recognized content strategist.
- **April:** Content Strategy and Experience, curated by Rahel Bailie, an STC Fellow and Director of Content for Babylon Health.
- **May:** Professional Development, curated by Alyssa Fox and Alisa Bonsignore. Alyssa is a former STC President and a content strategist and marketing leader. Alisa is a writer and researcher who clarifies complex ideas from her office in the San Francisco Bay Area, and currently serves on the STC Board of Directors.
- **June:** Leadership and Teams, curated by Toni Mantych, Senior Director of Product Content Experience at ServiceNow and a recognized Top 200 Content Experience Strategist.
- **July:** Content Design and Development for Machine Delivery, curated by Toni Byrd Ressaire, a consultant, trainer, and information developer. She founded the company Info4Design and is the Co-Founder of the Information 4.0 Consortium.
- **August:** Content Measurement + Intelligence, curated by Colleen Jones, author of The Content Advantage and Founder of Content Science, a content strategy and intelligence firm.
- **September** (currently underway): Globalization/Localization, curated by Karen Tkaczyk, an award-winning freelance translator, editor, and trainer.

And don't miss the content we have planned for the rest of 2019:

- **October:** Learning Experience Design, curated by Phylise Banner, a learning experience design pioneer with 25 years of experience.
- **November:** Content Engineering, curated by Cruce Saunders, a content experience strategist and Founder of [A], a Content Intelligence firm.
- **December:** Information Design 4.0, curated by Ray Gallon, an STC Associate Fellow, and President and Co-Founder of the Transformation Society.

The Founders' Rate will be available for a limited time only. However, you will lock in this special rate as long as you maintain your Roundtable subscription, even after the price goes up for everyone else. Sign up today!

Support the Revitalized STC Scholarship Fund

THE STC SCHOLARSHIP Committee is breathing new life into the scholarship fund this year. Do you want to support students who are preparing to enter the field of technical communication? Join your fellow STC members who have already contributed to the scholarship fund! Donate online here: *https://www.stc.org/support-stc-now/* or mail a check to: *Society for Technical Communication, 3251 Old Lee Highway, Suite 406, Fairfax, VA 22030.* Make sure you select the "restricted fund" when donating to ensure that your contribution goes toward the scholarship fund. We also accept corporate donations and endowments.

Donor Levels

The STC Scholarship Fund accepts donations from anyone who wants to further the field of technical communication by supporting undergraduate and graduate students who have a desire to contribute to our field. Please consider making a donation today! Donation levels are:

- Founder — $1,000 or more
- Partner — $500-$999
- Underwriter — $250-$499
- Patron — $100-$249
- Supporter — up to $99

Contributions are tax-deductible for U.S. citizens.

2020 Membership Season Now Open

STC'S 2020 MEMBERSHIP season is now open, and we want to pass on exclusive discounts and promotions that are only available to members!

We're excited to tell you that we have added the following new benefits in 2019 for increased value and a direct return on your professional investment:

- New Sustaining membership category, a long-term membership choice for those who wish to pledge their support to the technical communication profession by making a 15-year membership commitment with STC. See *www.stc.org/sustaining member/* for more information.
- New asynchronous online education courses, which let you work through course material at your own pace, over a set time period.
- New Health & Medicine Special Interest Group.
- New Salary Database, which will only be available to 2020 members.
- New Member Perks discounts from Blasty, BookingCommunity.com, GE, and ReillyCo Advertising.

Membership Categories	2020 Rates
Professional & Academic	$225
New Professional	$180
Student	$75
Retired	$145
Gold	$395

All 2020 members will continue to receive the same great benefits, including digital access to STC's *Technical Communication* journal and *Intercom* magazine, as well as discounts on CPTC certification, annual Technical Communication Summit & Expo registration, STC job bank postings, webinars, and online courses.

We look forward to having you as a member for 2020. Save the date to your calendars today!

Questions? Contact *membership@stc.org* or call + 1 (703) 522-4114.

Summit 2020—Call for Proposals

HAVE YOU ATTENDED the STC Technical Communication Summit & Expo in the past and thought we could have expanded on a topic, or covered something entirely new? Now is your chance to submit a proposal and be an official part of the program! **The 2020 Technical Communication Summit & Expo will be held 15-18 May in Bellevue, Washington, at the Hyatt Regency Bellevue, and we're inviting you to contribute your ideas, studies, experience, and expertise.**

The Summit attracts over 650 attendees and 40 exhibitors during a three-day period that brings together like-minded individuals to share and expand their knowledge of the technical communication field. We are looking for speakers to present their knowledge, research, work experiences, technical expertise, and, most importantly, their willingness to teach others.

Learn more about the submission process using these important links:

- Call for Proposals: *https://summit.stc.org/call-for-proposals/* — Learn about the general process, what we're looking for, how to upload your proposal, and more.
- Tracks and Topic Ideas: *https://summit.stc.org/call-for-proposals/summit-topics-and-ideas/* — Review a list of topic areas and tracks to inspire you.
- Types and Audience Experience Levels: *https://summit.stc.org/call-for-proposals/session-types/* — Submit either a presentation or a preconference workshop proposal. Submitters are limited to a total of three session proposal submissions and two preconference workshop submissions.

Proposals are due by 11:59 PM EDT (GMT-4) on Sunday, 15 September 2019. All proposals must be submitted through the online submission system outlined on the Call for Proposals webpage.

The work you are doing is an important element in the education process, and we invite you to share it with Summit attendees. Good luck, and we hope to see you in Bellevue!

If you have any questions, please contact the Conference Committee (*stcsummit@gmail.com*) for more information.

Announcing the 2020 Summit Conference Co-Chairs

STC IS PLEASED to announce the Conference Co-Chairs for the 2020 Technical Communication Summit & Expo: Cindy Currie and Aiessa Moyna! STC President Ben Woelk hailed the selections, saying:

"I'm excited to see Cindy and Aiessa build on last year's very successful Summit as we return after a long absence to the Pacific Northwest. I look forward to seeing many of you at the 2020 Summit in Bellevue, Washington next May at what promises to be an outstanding educational and networking event."

Cindy is an STC Past President. She is an STC Fellow, a member of the Project Management Institute (PMI), and holds four industry certifications: Project Management Professional (PMP), PMI-Agile Certified Practitioner (PMI-ACP), SAFe Program Consultant (SPTC), and Certified Professional Technical Communicator–Foundation (CPTC). Cindy has been a frequent speaker at STC's Summit since 1991, and many local and regional STC conferences throughout the years. This is Cindy's second year as conference co-chair, and she is looking forward to producing another outstanding educational program.

Aiessa has worked in various technical and corporate communications roles in government, nonprofit and corporate settings. She currently serves as Communications Director at American Express, providing consultation and support for the CIO and Technology division. She holds a BS in Technical Communication from New Mexico Tech and an MA in Communication Studies from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. A long-time STC volunteer, Aiessa is a former Society Treasurer and member of the Board of Directors. She currently serves on the STC Associate Fellows Committee and is manager of the STC New York Metro Chapter's Elections Committee. She previously supported the Summit as a track manager and proposal reviewer.

Cindy and Aiessa had this to say about their selection:

"We are thrilled and honored to have been selected as Conference Co-Chairs for the 2020 Summit. We also are delighted to have the chance to work together to serve the Society, its members, and other technical communicators by helping to deliver the premier educational and networking event of the year.

"The theme of this year's conference is Career Vision 20/20. Do you have 20/20 vision on your career? Our goal is for every technical communicator to have a clear vision for their future development and career growth. Whether you're just starting out in the profession or are an experienced practitioner or educator, attending this event will help you focus on techcomm practices, tools, and techniques that will help ensure your future success.

"Our overall vision is to continue to enhance the visibility, viability, and reach of STC's annual Summit & Expo. Specifically, we aim to appeal to a broad range of professionals and students by assembling a program that is relevant to attendees of all experience levels, across all industry segments and markets. In addition to sessions and workshops on core skills, technologies, and processes, we also plan to offer sessions on such topics as collaboration and teamwork, project and program management, workplace culture, and advanced leadership, including career paths for technical communicators. We look forward to an exciting conference and hope to see you there!"

Congratulations again to Cindy and Aiessa! We can't wait to see the conference program they're cooking up!

Reminder of Deadlines for Awards and Honors

THE DEADLINES FOR many of STC's awards and honors nominations are upcoming. Please see the STC website, *www.stc.org*, for more information or to find out how to nominate someone. Deadlines are subject to change.

- Associate Fellow Recommendations: 1 November 2019
- Fellow Nominations: 1 November 2019
- Sigma Tau Chi and Alpha Sigma Honors Societies: 2 October 2019
- Jay R. Gould Award for Excellence in Teaching Technical Communication: 2 October 2019
- Ken Rainey Award for Excellence in Research: 3 November 2019
- Distinguished Community Service Awards: 30 October 2019
- Community Achievement Awards: 28 January 2020
- Community Pacesetter Awards: 23 February 2020

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Getting Your First Job and Staying Sharp with More Training in Tech Comm

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BY KATHERINE (KIT) BROWN-HOEKSTRA | *STC Fellow* and **CINDY CURRIE** | *STC Fellow*

THE SHEER VOLUME of information available about various aspects of technical communication can feel like you are drinking from a firehose. In this column, we identify some resources that can help you get started.

What are some resources where I can get more training on tools and other topics I'm interested in?

STC membership offers robust educational offerings, including the Tech Comm Body of Knowledge (*https://www.tcbok.org/*), the Mentor Board (*https://www.stc.org/mentor-board/*), and online courses and webinars (*https://www.stc.org/education*). In addition, the STC community is supportive and a great place to build your network.

Additionally, STC is now offering Roundtable, a new subscription-based offering from STC that is separate from STC membership. Roundtable provides ongoing professional development in the form of fresh, high-quality content for 12 months on topics relevant to technical communicators and curated by well-known experts. You can find out more at *https://www.stc.org/roundtable*.

Here are some other places that you can go for help:

- To discover career paths you might find interesting, do an informational interview (see Kit's article in the May/June 2019 issue of *Intercom*).
- For training on tools, download the trial version and then find a tutorial on LinkedIn Learning *(https://www.linkedin.com/learning)*, the application site, or YouTube (*www.youtube.com*).
- To get started on DITA, go to *www.ditalearning.com* and take the free courses.
- Some books that will help you understand the field include:
  - *The Language of* series from XML press provides terminology and essays on how different terms apply practically on topics such as content strategy, technical communication, localization, and cybersecurity.
  - *Managing Enterprise Content* by Ann Rockley and Charles Cooper teaches you how to analyze and organize content for re-use.
  - *Every Page is Page One* by Mark Baker talks about taking your topic-based authoring to the next level.
  - *The Content Pool* by Alan Porter talks about content as a business asset.
  - *DITA 101* by Ann Rockley et al., explains the basics of DITA.
  - *Letting Go of the Words* by Ginny Redish.
  - *The Global English Style Guide* by John Kohl.
  - *Simplified Technical English* specification (free download from *www.asd-ste100.org*).
- Magazines and e-zines:
  - STC's *Intercom* magazine (*www.stc.org/intercom*).
  - STC's *Technical Communication* journal (*www.stc.org/techcomm*).
  - Multilingual (*www.multilingual.com*).
  - TECHWR-L (*https://techwhirl.com/*).
  - TC World (*http://www.tcworld.info/*).
- Blogs: *https://blog.feedspot.com/technical_writing_blogs/*.
- STC's *Notebook* blog (*https://www.stc.org/notebook*).

There are myriad resources out there for technical communicators. What we listed here doesn't even begin to scratch the surface, so talk to people around you who are doing cool things.

I just graduated and am struggling to find a job. How do I break into the field?

Technical communication is both broad and deep, so start with defining an industry or specialization that interests you. This will help you focus your search. Many

Ask a Tech Comm Manager is an advice column geared toward answering all those questions you have, but might be uncomfortable asking. We glean the questions from social media, forums, and most importantly, from you, dear reader. If we don't know an answer, we will interview experts and get information for you. Send us your questions to *kitbh.stc@gmail.com* or tweet them to *@kitcomgenesis* or the hashtag *#askTCmgr*.

jobs in our profession are not widely advertised, so you need to build your network.

Here are some ideas to get your network started.

- Volunteer for STC.
- Set up informational interviews with people who work for companies that interest you and in areas that interest you.
- Attend conferences and meetups.

Make sure that your résumé is error-free and effectively communicates your skills and interests. Keep your portfolio current. Learned a new tool? Use it to create a portfolio piece.

Continue to build your skills by blogging, contributing articles to industry publications, learning new tools and skills, etc. Get Jack Molisani's book, *Be the Captain of Your Career.*

Learn about the industry you are interested in.

- Who are the players?
- What are the trends?
- What are the biggest challenges?

Your first job is often the hardest one to get, so don't get discouraged. *Do* organize your search, and set goals of at least three to five contacts and applications per day. To an extent, job searching is a numbers game. You need to be consistently sending requests for contacts and applying for jobs, and then following up in a timely manner. Ask for help. Get a mentor. Show your enthusiasm and willingness to learn. Avoid the "yeah, buts…" when people make suggestions. Instead, take what makes sense and ignore the rest. Sometimes it feels like everyone is offering advice; it's because they care.

You also need to practice good self-care. Remember, you only need one YES, but to get that, you will hear a lot of NOs. Remember, you are interviewing the companies as much as they are interviewing you. Be willing to stretch yourself and also listen to your instincts. If it doesn't feel like a good fit, don't take the job. On the other hand, don't count yourself out if you don't meet 100 percent of the requirements. Willingness to learn, enthusiasm, and an ability to play well with others are more important, particularly in entry-level jobs, than being an expert in something.

You've got this.

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Enhance Your Skills.
Find Your Tribe.
Make a Difference.
The LavaCon Conference
Creating Unified Content Experiences
LavaCon is a conference for content strategists, documentation managers, and other content professionals.
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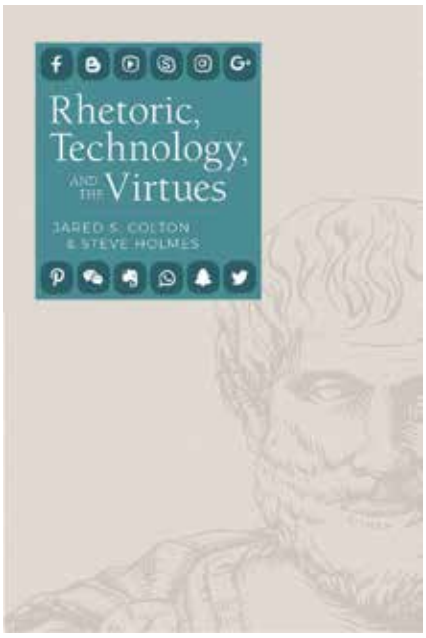
Virtue Ethics: An Interview with Jared S. Colton and Steve Holmes



BY RUSSELL WILLERTON | *STC Senior Member*

AUTHORS IN THE FIELD of technical communication have thought and written about ethics in their work for decades. Much of that writing and thinking has focused on what Mike Markel calls "foundational approaches" to ethics that have developed over many centuries. These foundational approaches frequently focus on principles that apply broadly (even universally). Philosopher Immanuel Kant developed the idea of a categorical imperative for ethics, in which one identifies guiding principles and always acts to uphold them. Deontological approaches involve identifying one's obligations toward others. The utilitarian approach involves acting to increase benefits from a situation and to decrease negative effects.

The concept of virtue ethics comes from Aristotle's treatise, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which Aristotle identifies 12 virtues of character that a citizen may embody. Intersections of virtue ethics and technical communication have not been explored much until recently. A new book, *Rhetoric, Technology, and the Virtues*, uses virtue ethics to provide a framework for thinking about ethics in digital and networked media. The authors are Jared S. Colton of Utah State University and Steve Holmes of Texas Tech University. I appreciate their responses to my questions about their new book.

Russel Willerton: What inspired you to write this book together?

Jared S. Colton and Steve Holmes: We have been discussing problems of ethics since we met over a decade ago. As we would chat about teaching professional writing and technical communication, we kept circling back to the fact that calls to *think ethically* far outstripped the development of ethical frameworks to guide ethical reasoning beyond a generalized (and important) postmodern/poststructuralist call to be inclusive of difference.

By comparison, we found implicit ethical frameworks grounded in virtue ethics or care ethics among a wide variety of past and present researchers. Our goal became to try to make frameworks more explicit in the field to that people can use them more readily. Regarding the specific issues we take up in the book, we wanted to write a book that would think about what kind of ethical people we, as humans, want to be. We live in an age where new technologies, such as social media, are changing our ethical actions and how we even think about morality. Some of that is a good thing: we're able to communicate, share, and help people in ways we never could before. However, we're also able to express unnecessary outrage, self-select what news we want to read and believe, and hurt people we would never have met in a lifetime before. One of the main goals of the book is to provide a language for how to talk about these kinds of things.

RW: How does the concept of virtue ethics differ from other approaches to ethics such as utilitarianism or Kant's categorical imperative?

JSC and SH: The main way virtue ethics differs from other approaches, which are still important to consider, is that it focuses on developing flexible ethical habits that can be used in many different situations. Rather than argue that morality is determined by the end achieved for the greater number of people (the

This column features ethics scenarios and issues that may affect technical communicators in the many aspects of their jobs. If you have a possible solution to a scenario, your own case, or feedback in general, please contact column editor Russell Willerton at *russell.willerton@gmail.com.*

utilitarian approach) or for fixed moral principles such as "never lie" (a Kantian approach), virtue ethics focuses on the kinds of conditions—including the technologies we use—that enable or prevent us from developing ethical habits, such as patience and being just, honest, and generous.

In a famous example that we discuss in the book, Socrates says that it is a good ethical habit to return what one has borrowed from a neighbor, but that only someone who lacks wisdom would return a borrowed weapon to a madman. Regardless of the situation at hand, virtue ethics privileges the ethical disposition that guides a particular action and not the end result or the repeatability of the same end across different circumstances.

RW: What is the concept of *hexis*, and how can people in technical fields apply it to ethics?

JSC and SH: The simplest way to describe the concept of *hexis* for us is *habits*. As Steve describes in his first book (*Procedural Habits*, on the rhetoric of videogames), habits are historically described as mechanistic. They are opposed to conscious thought and attention, such as in the colloquial phrase "driving on autopilot." But there is an alternative concept of habit as our "second nature" that fundamentally shapes how we act and think in the world.

In texts like Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, hexis is not reducible to rote habits, such as chewing with your mouth closed or always closing the gas cap when we fill up our vehicles. Hexis is better understood through its root in the verb Echein, which is often translated as "to have" but more means an "active having." Hexis is a flexible form of pragmatic reasoning that is more like a mode of "bodily comportment" or "state."

For the Greeks, a person's hexis (plural) also defined that person's character, who they were ("Are you patient?" "Are you caring?"). Importantly, a hexis becomes virtuous *not* when it is at its most extreme. Someone who has the virtue of honesty won't just constantly be telling the truth, like telling some they look ugly just to "tell the truth."

Developing virtuous habits, then, can happen only when you learn to recognize them in others—parents, teachers, leaders—and then repeatedly work on them until, for example, you're able to be patient when patience is called for and angry when anger is needed.

RW: What is one of the case studies in your book that resonates with the field of technical communication?

JSC and SH: Our case study about how to cultivate the virtue of *justice* in the context of captioning social media videos (Chapter 3) is a good example. This coincides with a large number of recent publications and presentations about intersections of technical communication and social justice.

To highlight the need to be explicit about the ethical and political frameworks that we use, we draw a distinction between passive equality (redistributive justice as signaling the presence of an injustice and awaiting a state or institutional redress) and active equality (action an individual takes without waiting for a state or institutional response). Drawing on the French political theorist Jacques Ranciere, whose thinking, we argue, stems from virtue ethics in all but name, we explore how justice can be enacted in areas of *de jure* political inequality by deaf technical communicators and their allies.

We picked social media videos and captioning, because as of when our book was published, there were no legal requirements (or ethically *deontological* obligations) for captioning social media videos as there were for television shows. As a result, a perfect exigency exists for technical communicators who create social media videos to think about how they might cultivate a virtue of justice in the absence of legal or institutional permissiveness and support.

RW: Each of you teaches students who work or will work in technical communication. What is something about ethics that you hope your students will carry into their careers?

JSC: Sometimes technical communication can seem completely neutral, like "I'm just communicating something as clearly and accurately as possible." Those things are important, but I also want my students to imagine themselves as citizens and realize that how they act and what they write in their professional and personal lives can affect other people for better or worse. I want my students to be examples to others of what an ethical technical communicator should be like.

SH: I hope that my students learn that ethics is not a proverbial "one size fits all" situation, which is perhaps best captured by our book chapter on the virtue of patience (slowness to anger). It is always easiest to respond to a new ethical problem by relying upon our settled or prior beliefs. However, the deeper one goes into different ethical frameworks, which are hardly monolithic or consistent categories to begin with, the more complex the project of ethical reasoning in any given circumstance becomes. Thus, I hope my students come to appreciate the fact that ethics is messy. Ethics requires the habitual patience to pause and think about any particular problem in the workplace from multiple ethical perspectives beyond one's own immediate end.

RESOURCES

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Recommendations for Accessibility & Usability

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BY SHAUN MARQUARDT | *Guest Columnist*

WHEN DESIGNING WEB pages, products, or services, it is easy to forget to include all the members of our society, especially users with disabilities. It is not a person's individual (dis)ability, but rather product designs, that create barriers to accessibility.

This article presents some guidelines to make your business' website more usable and accessible to customers of all abilities. Any business misses almost 20 percent of potential customers if it does not pay attention to the needs and interests of disabled people. This group has a sizable discretionary income—$175 billion dollars' worth (Theofanos and Redish 2003).

This article introduces key concepts about disability, accessibility, and usability, emphasizing the necessity of treating disabled users as people and the importance of web accessibility. Lastly, this article reviews what I believe are the ten most important guidelines for designing accessible websites.

The Importance of Accessibility

Accessibility has been defined as equality, the degree to which a product, website, or service can be used by people of all abilities. For disabled people, this means not only equal physical access, but access to the same tools, services, facilities, and opportunities as non-disabled people.

Usability, though overlapping with areas of accessibility, has distinctly defined components of its own. Meeting the minimum required accessibility standards on a website does not necessarily mean that the site is usable. For example, forcing a page to automatically refresh (through features like a dynamically updating date/time stamp) renders a page unusable by users of screen readers, because the software frequently "jumps" back to the top of the page (Theofanos and Redish 2003).

It is important to think of people with disabilities as not just "blind people" or "Deaf people." Such words label someone based on their disability and classify them as people who are not valued members of our society. People with disabilities have lives just like everyone else. They have basic needs, such as a simple ramp for mobility, which is an everyday need for a wheelchair user, much akin to a car.

An individual I interviewed expressed the need and desire to "[be able to use products] all of the time, and not some of the time." Disabled people want products and services made available and usable to them without a whole lot of fuss on their end. An example of accessible technology that this particular individual praised was the advent of digital assistive and voice recognition technology, such as Siri, which "just worked" right out of the box.

Top 10 Tips for Improving Accessibility

What follows are my top ten tips for improving the accessibility and usability of your business website. I strongly recommend implementing the first six items; otherwise, your business' services and website will not be accessible to disabled customers. The last four tips are suggestions to further increase the accessibility and usability for those customers. Apply these recommendations not only for your customers, but also for your employees and guests.

The Student Perspectives column provides insights, experiences, research, and more from students across technical communication. We're proud to introduce new voices, inject new ideas, and give the practitioners of tomorrow a platform to begin publishing their thought leadership today! Columnist Ryan Weber teaches technical communication at the University of Alabama in Huntsville and hosts the podcast 10-Minute Tech Comm. Contact him at *rw0019@uah.edu* to submit or pitch a column idea.

1. Begin with an inclusive, universal design process.

Remember: products create the barriers to accessibility, not a person's individual ability. Consider the blind, Deaf, elderly, or those in a wheelchair, for example, as crucial users from very early in the design. Universal design principles start from the premise that there is no typical, average, or normal user (Horton and Quesenbery 2013).

2. Take a firm stance on accessibility and usability.

Developers might be in denial, become frustrated about implementing accessibility guidelines, or attempt to convince the business that the rules do not apply to them. They might attempt to negotiate by leaving accessibility compliance until the end of the project or doing the bare minimum of accessibility work.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) provide a good place to start, but the business should not accept the minimum Level A Compliance. There is a quick-start WCAG checklist available online at *https://webaim.org/standards/wcag/checklist.*

Businesses contracting or interfacing with the U.S. Government must also be Section 508 compliant. See *https://webaim.org/standards/508/checklist* and *https://www.section508.gov/.*

3. Write for the Web.

Write short, clear, straightforward sentences in plain, easy-to-understand words. Get to the point quickly by placing the most important words at the top of the page, or at the beginning of links or paragraphs.

Be sure not to sound repetitive when describing links, and avoid using unclear words like "click here."

4. Make one version accessible to all.

Some companies try to make separate accessible versions of their Web pages and products, but blind people have stated that they would rather just have one version that is accessible to all. Often the text-based version is old and outdated (Theofanos and Redish 2003).

Instead of spending the time and effort to create and maintain two versions of the website, make one version that is usable to everyone.

5. Be sure to properly label images, forms, and links.

Labeling becomes absolutely critical in an online medium. Do not place text on images, because the screen reader will not be able to read it.

Do not include text as part of a fillable field, and ensure that you do not place text between form fields. Instead, always place the label to the left of the form field.

6. Ensure users can interact with elements in multiple ways.

Users might not be able to "see" the link with their eyes, use their hands to move or click the mouse, or use the keyboard. Ensuring proper coding of an interactable element for a keyboard command will help, as multiple accessibility technologies emulate a key press.

A person can use voice to emulate the keyboard. Check to see if your links work with voice commands and are easy to pronounce for people who may have a speech impediment.

7. Design good site structure.

Keep links on the home page to a minimum, using node pages as needed. Ensure each section of your page is clearly delineated so that customers with reading disabilities do not get confused.

Avoid strong colors or images, as they may impact users with various physical and mental disabilities such as ADD, dyslexia, and dysgraphia.

Ensure the most important business functions and systems, including online reservation systems and checkouts, can be easily accessed by all customers.

8. Eliminate the concept of normalcy.

The concepts of "normal" and "common sense" are very exclusive in nature. These words split and categorize people according to attributes like the color of skin, gender, or ability.

9. Keep it simple.

An overly complicated website can be very distracting and difficult for people with disabilities. All readers are raiders. They only want to get to the really meaningful information.

10. Translate language.

For companies with a global customer base, consider manually translating your website into the common languages that your customers speak. Machine-based translations can sometimes be used for less common languages.

Creating an inclusively designed business and website will help you reach all potential customers and maximize your revenue. Following these guidelines and employing them in both the design and implementation of all aspects of your business could lead to greater profits. Accessibility and usability are just good business, and they're the right thing to do.

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Taking the Leap: Helping Professionals Transition to Scholarly Writing

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BY THOMAS BARKER | *STC Fellow*

RECENTLY AN ARTICLE in *Chronicle Vitae* asserted that a doctorate will not prepare students for professions outside academia. The article claimed that a doctorate has "little or no connection to their current work and profession" (Wood 2019). If we turn this assertion around, we might ask, "Does professional work prepare a student for academia?" The answer is maybe. In this column, I explore the challenges professionals face when transitioning to academic work. What mindsets might they bring to their new role as scholars? How might they re-envision their thinking and writing to make it more scholarly? How can they take the leap to scholarly writing?

A typical transitional scenario might play out like this: a college or university graduate spends a few years working in industry or the social, governmental, or educational sector. They realize that a Master's (or possibly a PhD) might open the door to desirable professional tracks or better pay. At the University of Alberta's Master's in Communication and Technology (MACT) program, we see cohorts of these folks applying to expand their professional horizons. In making this leap, they face significant challenges.

Challenges of Transitioning from Work to Scholarship

A conversation with Dr. Gordon Gow, Director of the MACT program, uncovered some typical challenges faced by students transitioning from work to scholarship.

Writing and Communicating

The academic writing style is significantly different from the descriptive reporting often done in the workplace. Critical writing and expository purposes pose real challenges for transitioning professionals.

Responsibility for Learning

Graduate-level work requires that students take responsibility for their learning. Students manage their courses, set their own learning goals, and decide where to put their energies. A typical response from a student in our classes might be, "I can do that?" Of course you can!

Learning New Tools

Sometimes transitioning professionals lack skills in using the common tools of academia. These might include document and reference management tools, ethics applications, and grant support services. We have a librarian attached to our program. Do the students take advantage of this service? Not right away, and not enough, says Gow.

Building Intellectual Capital

Learning at the post-Bachelor's level can often mean keeping track of readings, keeping records of ideas, and keeping notes. "It's like a savings account," says Gow. You store and curate your ideas, quotes, and hunches, so they will be available when needed. This kind of knowledge management may still elude even seasoned academics, but seeing the value of it can help a transitioning professional build intellectual capital.

This column focuses on a broad range of practical academic issues from teaching and training to professional concerns, research, and technologies of interest to teachers, students, and researchers. Please send comments and suggestions to column editor Thomas Barker at *ttbarker@ualberta.ca.*

Being Comfortable with Divergent Thinking

Workplace constraints often encourage professionals to define problems clearly and find clear solutions. In academia, the emphasis falls on divergent thinking, working with ill-defined problem sets and keeping solutions at bay. In fact, academics often think in terms of *problematizing* an issue instead of accepting expedient solutions. The trickiest area for transitioning professionals lies in the academic emphasis on questions over solutions, broad ideas over narrow applications, theoretical over practical thinking, and argument over description.

How to Help

As coaches and mentors for transitioning professionals, academics often focus on writing and communication skills. These skills represent an arena where many of the challenges we have just reviewed come into focus for students. These skills also represent how students can address their existing workplace frames of reference in ways that help them land on their feet in the academic world.

Over many years working with industry and community partners in MA and PhD programs in the United States and Canada, I have personally shepherded many workplace professionals into academic and scholarly work, mostly through their writing. In the remainder of this column, I present some techniques that might help keep these adventurous learners on track.

Using Scholars' Tools

Research tools used by professionals can range from a chat with someone else to structured qualitative or quantitative research. Usually it's more like the former, and in some cases, boils down to searching in Google. For the scholar, on the other hand, research is always structured around empirical or community-based participatory approaches. Sometimes transitioning professionals lack skills in using libraries, indexes, and databases (mostly databases); online journals; and even visits to the stacks. Getting to know a librarian is always a good idea.

While the "newness" of scholarly work may appear as a training problem (learning RefWorks, EndNote, or my favorite, Paperpile), the crux of the transitioning problem starts with gaining familiarity with academic libraries themselves.

Some libraries are leading the way with innovative programs targeting community and workplace researchers. Many libraries, attempting to soften the landing of workplace-oriented patrols, are evolving to align their services more closely to the holistic academic journey. In many cases, this means that the library can be an ally in bridging the gap between workplace thinking and academic thinking. This bridging occurs through workshops connecting resources to workplace problem-solving, improved user experiences, and research forums to share techniques and resources. Once they can identify useful and reliable scholarly sources, transitioning professionals are ready to tackle the next hurdle: writing like an academic.

Learning the Scholarly Style

In workplace and professional writing, documents often follow templates (for proposals and reports) that carry a certain, sometimes boilerplate, style. In the workplace, style is sometimes seen as "wordsmithing." Wordsmithing tends to focus on text elements of clarity and style, not really content. This emphasis on clarity is foremost for professionals. "Short and sweet" or "to the point" are often used to describe good writing.

In academic writing, the focus is more on content, so fixing text isn't just to make it clearer, but to shape an argument. Consider this sentence:

> *The advantages of process improvements affect all levels of authority.*

The workplace writer would edit this to say, "Process improvements affect all levels of authority."

The intention is to make the claim and possibly alert those in authority to anticipate changes. The scholarly writer on the other hand, might edit this to say, "Among the advantages of improving processes is to distribute organizational change throughout stakeholder groups, including those associated with pre-defined levels of authority." The second version is clearly longer. But the focus here is not on brevity (to accommodate busy professional readers) but on stipulating and evoking broader concerns (theoretical attempts at organizational change, or identification of organizational groupings and structures). These (presumably) comprise the theoretical argument being made.

That theoretical argument, and the argument itself, is a key to academic writing. Drafting it, and editing it, is always at the service of clarifying the cumulative point being made. Clarity means clarity of argument, not precision of reference. What appears "wordy" or "verbose" is actually an attempt by the writer to associate the ideas with pre-existing claims, arguments, logical structures, and theoretical frameworks.

While the successful professional writer takes pride in a breezy style, the scholarly writer strives for a style that encourages the reader to slow down and to make deeper, often critical inferences: a striving that results in a denser, interwoven, questioning style. The intention to share and influence other scholars justifies the more formal, argumentative style. The scholarly creates into what is called *the scholarly conversation*.

Joining a Scholarly Conversation

All writing, workplace or university, is a type of conversation. Even a humble statement like "Choose Open from the File Menu" has something of a conversational basis. The reader responds (by clicking or pointing) and awaits the next command from

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the textual interlocutor. Professional writers live in textual conversations all the time, such as through email or chat. In some ways, proposals and reports (two key workplace genres) create and maintain existing relationships among players. Clients relate through proposals and leadership relates through reports, so in simple terms, the transitional professional just needs to learn to speak to a new readership: other scholars.

What does it mean to join the scholarly community? What is the scholarly community? Well, over time, certain theories and explanations at a broad level come to define the questions scholars try to answer. What is the best way to structure research? What class of social interventions leads to effective social policy? Why do some communicative behaviors work and others do not? Researchers who ask those "why" questions make up the scholarly community. Sometimes they follow broad, seemingly unanswerable, questions for years or decades. Each scholar adds more facts (evidence, perceptions, analyses) to the collective understanding.

A case in point is a topic I am currently working on, which is how to approach research from the perspective of Indigenous research methodologies. To start off, I needed to know what questions researchers were focusing on. A good start came when I discovered a call for papers on the topic of Indigenous knowledge, priorities, and processes in qualitative research. This call for papers was for articles in a focused, special issue of a journal on qualitative research methods. So right away, I knew that there must be some ongoing questions about how to do qualitative research in Indigenous context. Who knew? Reading the call for papers helped me to identify questions that other scholars were asking about the topic, and see where my analyses (in this case of published stories by Indigenous authors) fit into—and helped answer—some of these questions.

Calls for papers like the one discussed above are invaluable resources for transitioning professionals. Almost all academic journals have at least one each year. What's happening is that a scholar identifies a topic that a number of "conversants" (scholarly writers) are interested in and around which she has volunteered to assemble the ideas into a special issue of the journal. How convenient! Not only that, almost all "special issues" of scholarly journals (usually identified by having the table of contents on the cover, not inside) originated as calls for papers. All the transitioning professional needs do is study these special issues (and the calls that led to them) to get a ready and robust sense of what a scholarly conversation actually looks like.

Making the Leap to Scholarly Writing

As far as transitions go, making the leap from professional work and writing to scholarly work and writing is one of the trickiest and most frustrating. No voice is as lost as the one you need when you have to make statements around a table or in print, and the people sitting there seem to be speaking a different language. Similarly, no tools feel as unwieldy as those connected with complex ideas and seemingly obtuse institutions and traditions. Mastering your tools, finding your voice, and fitting in with a new community likely represent *the* major hurdles for professionals transitioning to scholarly work. As academics, it's our responsibility to help by understanding the challenges new scholars face, helping them master basic tools, clarifying writing purposes and conventions, and familiarizing them with current scholarly conversations. In this way, transitioning professionals can feel a little more confident when they take the leap.

RESOURCE

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Mark Your Calendar

Organization Events Across the Globe

FYI lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to *intercom@stc.org.*

1 10-12 Oct
The **Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC)** will be holding its annual conference 10–12 October 2019 at West Chester University in West Chester, Pennsylvania.
CPTSC
https://cptsc.org/conference/
conference@cptsc.org.

2 19-23 Oct
The **Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T)** will have its 82nd Annual Meeting 19–23 October 2019 at the Crown Conference Centre in Melbourne, Australia.
ASIS&T
https://www.asist.org/am19
meetings@asist.org
301-495-0900 x1500

3 20-22 Oct
The **Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)** will be holding its annual conference 20–22 October 2019 at the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina Hotel in San Diego, CA.
PRSA
http://apps.prsa.org/Conferences/InternationalConference/

4 23-26 Oct
The **American Translators Association (ATA)** will hold its 60th annual conference 23–26 October 2019 at the Palm Springs Convention Center in Palm Springs, CA.
ATA
https://www.atanet.org/conf/2019/

5 28 Oct-1 Nov
The **Human Factors in Ergonomics Society (HFES)** will be holding its annual conference 28 October-1 November 2019 at the Sheraton Grand Seattle in Seattle, WA.
HFES
http://www.hfes2019.org/
llawson@hfes.org

6 6–9 Nov
The **American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)** Medical Writing and Communication Conference will take place 6–9 November 2019 at the Sheraton San Diego Hotel and Marina in San Diego, CA.
AMWA
conference@amwa.org
240-238-0940
https://www.amwa.org/page/Conference

"Up in the Sky! It's a bird! It's a..."

BY MARK LOPA | *STC Member*

PEOPLE WILL SOMETIMES see me look up at the sky, then down at my phone, then back up at the sky, then down at my phone again. Finally, I'll enthusiastically point upward and yell, "there it is!" As it turns out, I have a passion for tracking airplanes. I'll be standing outside in our yard or in a parking lot or anywhere I can see the sky, and whenever I hear an airplane, I jump into action. I have a gift of being able to hear airplanes loud and clear further than 40,000 feet high and 50 miles away. This gives me plenty of time to do what I need to do.

My father used to take me to the airport when I was a kid to watch planes take off and land, and today I do that either alone or with my son. He loves it as much as I do. Then, one day a couple of years ago, I stumbled upon this smart phone application called Flightradar24 that tracks airplanes. It tells you where the plane is, where it came from, where it's going, how high it is, how fast it's going, what kind of airplane it is, and it even has a picture of that exact aircraft. I instantly downloaded it.

Soon after that, I heard a plane in the sky. Using the app, I zoomed in on my location, and there it was. It was in real time and passed over my head just as the little icon was moving over my blue glowing location dot. It was going from Orlando to my home airport in Hartford. A few minutes later, another plane came by, and then another, and yet another. Something stirred inside of me. This was the coolest thing in the world.

Whenever I hear a plane, I instantly take out my phone and check it out. It's fascinating to see how many different places these planes take off from and where they're going. There is a plane traffic route right over our house used by aircraft flying from New York City airports to Europe. There are no end to these planes. By the time they fly over my house, they have been in the air for 16 minutes and at an altitude of about 32,000 feet. We live exactly 100 miles from New York City, so 100 miles in 16 minutes isn't all that bad!

My favorite planes to track are planes coming from the south going to Bradley International Airport, following a route just to the left of the Connecticut River. Sometimes these planes are only at 3,500 feet and fly right over our house. I feel like I can reach out and touch them. It's easy to identify the airline since they're so close. The craziest time was when a FedEx plane from New York to Hartford flew by. It was the lowest plane I had ever seen, and my app said it was at 2,000 feet. It was so low and loud I was certain something was wrong, but my app showed that it landed safely.

Once, at my parents' house, I took out my phone to check out a plane going by. My father had observed me do this many times and finally asked, "What does that do for you?" It's my hobby! I guess you get it or you don't. My son and I evidently do, and I'm glad we do, because it's a lot of fun. Give it a try sometime. You might surprise yourself.

MARK LOPA (mark@lopa.net) *is a technical writer from Newington, Connecticut. His career started with a co-op job while still attending Central Connecticut State University. As a contract worker, he has been employed in various fields, including healthcare, utilities, manufacturing, government, finance, and technology. Besides tracking airplanes, he enjoys playing hockey; vacationing on Cape Cod; anything Disney; and spending time with his wife, children, and dogs.*

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